ISSUE #73: LEADING LADIES 10 YEARS LATER

METROID PRIME 4: BEYOND

SUPER MARIO PARTY JAMBOREE

CLOCK TOWER: REWIND

NINTENDO WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS: NES EDITION

MARVEL VS. CAPCOM FIGHTING COLLECTION: ARCADE CLASSICS

ARRANGER: A ROLE-PUZZLING ADVENTURE

SUPER MONKEY BALL: BANANA RUMBLE

THE LEGEND OF HEROES: TRAILS THROUGH DAYBREAK

10 YEARS LATER: ANOTHER INTERVIEW WITH MARIEL CARTWRIGHT

A TRIP TO LONG ISLAND RETRO GAMING EXPO

THE LEGEND OF ALL THE DIFFERENT ZELDAS

SEPTEMBER/ OCTOBER 2024

COMING TO KICKSTARTER ON SEPTEMBER 10!

THE SECOND NF BOOK is launching its Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign soon. (Or maybe it's already live, if you're reading this page after September 10!) We had a lot of success returning to the Kickstarter platform to raise funds to print the first NF Book, The Impact of Iwata, last year. So we're going to take the same approach for this one, and I hope you'll show up to support it too!

NES Endings Compendium: Volume 2 is the second entry in a series of books that will ultimately cover every NES game ever made. In the books, author Rey Esteban examines the endings of NES adventures. What's the final boss fight like? What happens after the player achieves victory? Is there a grandiose final cutscene to reward the players' hard work, or does the game end with a boring nothingburger like a basic "Congratulations" message on a black screen? Some endings are iconic. Others are bland beyond belief! The Compendium collects them all.

Volume 1 in the series was published last year by Limited Run and is still available to order from their website, so seek it out first if you want to begin at the beginning. But they weren't going to be able to do Volume 2 (we won't get into the why here), so we at NF Publishing stepped up to help Rey keep the series going — and we'd love to have your support as we pick up this dropped torch and run with it ourselves! — **LUCAS**

Become a Backer on Kickstarter starting on September 10. The campaign will end on October 10! Don't miss it!

kickstarter.com/projects/nfpublishing/nes-endings-compendium-volume-2

ISSUE #73:
LEADING LADIES
10 YEARS LATER

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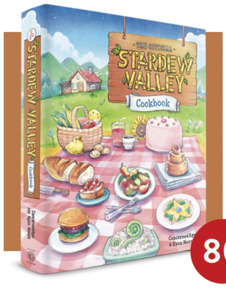

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ON THE COVER

It's been exactly 10 years since we first used the theme "Leading Ladies" for our 11th issue; Shantae claimed that cover spot a decade ago. And wouldn't you know it? Just in time for the double-digit anniversary, another prominent adventure with a female protagonist is just ahead on the release schedule! The Legend of Zelda: Echoes of Wisdom is an incredibly exciting new entry in a venerable franchise that has previously only featured a male lead in its mainline games. The brand's finally switching that up!

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SEPTEMBER/
OCTOBER 2024

INBOX

THE DIFFERENCE A DECADE MAKES

Hello, Nintendo Force readers!

When we were doing the planning for this issue, I discovered that not only would this be the 10th anniversary of our Leading Ladies cover story, but it would also be the 10th anniversary of my first contribution to Nintendo Force! (I wrote about the PAX East Pokémon League, which is still going strong, in the Community section.) In the past decade, I've covered the Pokémon World Championships, traveled to conventions to demo all sorts of interesting titles, guested on all sorts of fun podcasts and met a whole bunch of fans, both at events and online. I also got out of my comfort zone and dealt with my mental health a lot more – acts that take a lot of courage, which is a quality that any leading lady has in spades!

A lot has happened in both the world and the world of gaming since then – we've witnessed the fall of the Wii U and the meteoric rise of the Nintendo Switch, we've seen amazing new IPs and the sad endings to development studios and gaming publications, and we've experienced earth-shattering, once-in-a-lifetime events that have had ripple effects on not only the industry, but our daily lives. It also feels like every time a little progress is made, it gets dragged back down by the loudest voices with the deepest pockets and shallowest souls. It's times like these when courage is needed – the courage to be our authentic selves, to stand up to bullies, to do what's right and to live our lives to the fullest.

Our main leading lady of this issue is Princess Zelda, who is finally getting to be the star of her own adventure! (We do *not* talk about the CD-i games – unless you're Nadia Oxford, and you're on a retrospective panel.) It's been a long time coming, and we're taking a look back at her many incarnations over the decades, as both damsel in distress and mighty warrior royalty. We've also got a brand-new look at gameplay for Metroid Prime 4, for those who prefer their leading ladies to use technology instead of magic.

We've also revisited our Leading Ladies list by looking at some new characters who have either made their debut in the past decade or stepped back into the spotlight in a big way – just look at Mayor Pauline! They come from all walks of life, but the one thing they all have in common is courage.

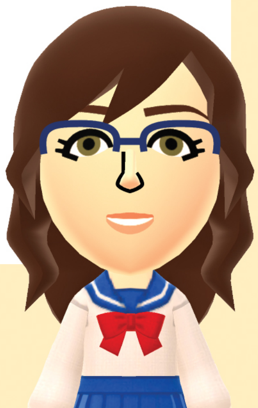
Finally, we're following up with Skullgirls artist Mariel Cartwright to talk about how her world has changed over the last 10 years, as she's now Creative Lead for WayForward's upcoming remake of the 16-bit horror classic Clock Tower.

Before I sound too much like the Cowardly Lion in MGM's The Wizard of Oz, I'll close off with a challenge to all you readers: Show your courage! Do one thing today that scares you!

Have fun,

Rebecca Rudranath

REBECCA RUDRANATH, STAFF WRITER



ISSUE #72: JULY/AUGUST 2024

We powered ourselves up to present our last issue's look back at the life and career of the legendary artist of Dragon Ball, Dragon Quest, Chrono Trigger and so many more beloved series, Akira Toriyama. Thank you all for all the positive feedback you've sent in for the issue, as well as your positive posts across social media! It's our fans who are the real fighters!

Our last Player's Poll looked ahead to our revisited Leading Ladies theme with three questions. First, we asked you to choose the best game that's been released since 2014 with a female protagonist. Second, a hype check: We wanted to know how excited you are to see Princess Zelda step into the playable spotlight for the new Echoes of Wisdom game. Finally, we asked you to pick a lady who has yet to lead, and invent a game for her to star in. Here's what you said:

LETTERS

In Bravely Second: End Layer (the true and worthy sequel to Bravely Default), the indomitable Edea Lee takes over as the functional protagonist, usurping the comparatively bland Tiz from the original game. Her strong personality, sense of ethics and excellent voice acting make her one of my favorite JRPG characters.

I'm a big fan of badass women taking over a franchise from the guys, and I have been lamenting my lack of a playable Zelda for literal decades. I'm thrilled that she finally (FINALLY) gets her own game, and one made in the utterly charming Link's Awakening remake engine no less! There may be some friendly arguments in my household about who gets to play it first.

The female character who I have in mind for her own video game has TECHNICALLY already had one, but it never officially released in the States (and it was deeply mediocre), so where is my properly localized, wonderfully realized Sailor Moon JRPG? It needs a suitably ridiculous title, something like Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon: Lunar Lament of the Silver Millennium, and it should play like a combination of Persona 5 and Tokyo Mirage Sessions, with school life sections broken up by sparkly turn-based combat with beautifully rendered super attacks. I will preorder it at once. **– RACHEL K.**

I'd say Splatoon 3. The Splatoon series brings female characters to the forefront (the bands) but also blurs the lines between everything pretty well, especially for a Nintendo game.

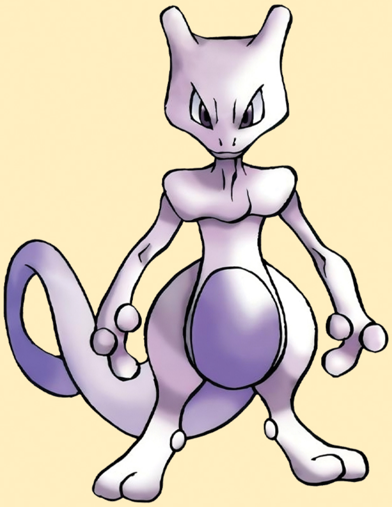
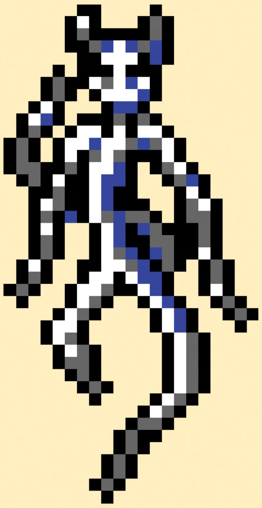
Yeah, I'm hyped for playable Zelda! I love Link as a character, but I wish more spin-off games let you be other characters and/or races. Like a Goron or a Zora (probably still crushing on Majora's Mask, to be fair). Playing as Zelda lets you bring some cool magic elements into everything. Hopefully they make more diverse games! (Other than Tingle-centric ones, of course.)

Captain Syrup from Wario Land! I'd love to see a Paper Mario-type game where you play as Captain Syrup and sail around Kitchen Island stealing treasures. I think it could play into the Paper Mario humor, and Captain Syrup could be manipulating Wario into stealing treasure and accidentally/incidentally helping islanders. Wario Land enemies would make some really fun companion characters as well. **– CURTIS**

The best female protagonist would be Aloy from the Horizon series. Although she is not a Nintendo character, she will soon be playable on the Switch in a new LEGO game. I'll have to give it a try, as I love Aloy!

A female character who has never had her own game is Rosalina. I'd like to see her in a modern outfit instead of a dress. She could do a version of an RPG. Maybe Paper Rosalina, as I do enjoy all of the Paper Mario games. **– CAROL L.**

The best game since 2014 that featured a female protagonist has to be Metroid Dread. When you factor in the insane development the game had for almost 20 years, the fact that it delivered on a new 2D Metroid experience for the first

MEWTWO'S MOTHER 1 CONNECTION

Hey NF! This is a message on the Toriyama tribute section of Issue #72. (Which was awesome.) But I wanted to make a quick correction to one part. While I will not dispute the possible influence of Frieza in Mewtwo's design (namely the colors), Mewtwo's biggest inspiration actually comes from Giegue from Mother 1!

This is due to Creatures Inc., formerly known as Ape Inc., being the developers of the first two Mother games. There are several references to Mother in the original Gen 1 games, such as Dragonite and several Psychic-types, but Mewtwo is the biggest reference with him being a near clone (lol) of Giegue.

Both characters are psychic masters with abilities that dwarf all those around them, they hate humanity due to scientific experimentation, and their designs are both white, cat-like creatures with long tails, a muzzle and vertical ears. Just look at the two side by side: It's impossible not to see shared influences!

Just thought I'd share this! **— ANIGRIFFIN**

Early Mewtwo art on the left, and Giegue's sprite from Mother 1/EarthBound Beginnings on the right. You're spot-on with this connection! Our article mentioned Mewtwo's similarities to Frieza with the look of their tails and their overall color schemes, but we certainly didn't mean to imply that Frieza was the *only* influence on Mewtwo's design. Clearly not!

time in that amount of time is nothing short of unbelievable. Samus has and always will be one of the coolest female leads in all of gaming, and this game was another fantastic entry that has earned so much praise that some even called it their favorite 2D entry in the series.

I'm definitely super hyped to play as Zelda in a Legend of Zelda game. The fact that they're changing up the gameplay specifically for Zelda to be unique has me surprised, shocked and pleased.

A female character who has never had her own game to star in would be Rosalina. The game would be called Rosalina's Space Journey and it would show her journey continuing from the storybook in Super Mario Galaxy up until the present events of that game. It would be a 3D platformer like the Galaxy games are, and would certainly make people who have wanted Super Mario Galaxy 3 happy! (And yes, that includes me.) **— MATTHEW H.**

I'd have to give this one to Samus in Metroid Dread. It's still hard to believe all the hype that led up to its release after nearly 20 years of teasers and scant news, but it delivered and developed Samus' character like never before. I've always enjoyed silent protagonists, and her steely resolve before enduring isolation and tough odds is always inspiring. Plus, her one spoken line to Grey Robe right as her theme kicks in is just **chef's kiss**.

Yes, I'm hyped for playable Zelda, and it's been a long time coming! Like many others, I feel like she should have been playable to some extent in Tears of the Kingdom, but better late than never. I'm overjoyed to be returning to the stylistic trappings of 2019's Link's Awakening as well.

On the topic of Zelda, I've always wanted a game focused on Impa. In this case, I'd like it to be something of a prequel to OoT called The Legend of Zelda: Shadows of the Past; it would be a much grimmer entry. It would delve into the dark deeds undertaken by the Sheikah clan in defense of the Royal Family that we uncovered briefly in the Shadow Temple and the Bottom of the Well. It would have many of the trappings of a typical Zelda game, but gameplay would be more focused on stealth and platforming, and the game would have an emphasis on collecting lore from the environment, not unlike how it's treated in the Metroid Prime series. **— BLAKE G.**

The best game since 2014 with a female protagonist? For me, it's a tie between Metroid: Samus Returns and Star Fox 2. I mean, Samus Returns takes a great game (Metroid II: Return of Samus, for those of you who haven't played the original), and expands it! I mean, you've got Samus eliminating all the different types of Metroids (Larva, Alpha, Gamma, Zeta, Omega and Queen), PLUS new boss battles, including Proteus Ridley (BTW, I don't know why they're calling him that – to me he was always just Ridley, except for when he went Meta and Omega)! Star Fox 2 is kind of cheating, since there are two female leads (Miyu and Fay), and they're two of six playable characters, but in my book, they still count! **— RAYMOND H.**

I know she technically had one already, but Melody of Memory is NOT a game about Kairi – it's a 22-minute OVA special stapled onto Theatrythym 4. Kairi of Kingdom Hearts needs her own Princess Fun Time Adventure and Training Montage, dangit! I want to kick the forces of darkness in the face while looking FABULOUS while doing so! I don't have any more to say on this matter; these are my demands, BOB IGER! **— ZEEBOR**

Thank as always to everyone who took the time to send in responses to our Player's Poll! Here's a little behind-the-scenes insight for you: We don't usually get a *ton* of submissions, so if you *do* send one in, your likelihood of seeing your name in print and winning the big prize is always really high. So be a respondent, if you please!

CARTER'S CORNER

Hello again!

I think some Pokémon that should get Mega Evolutions are Luxray, Drapion, Druddigon, Avalugg, Skarmory, Kleavor, Machamp and the resident dragons of every region. Lots of Pokémon should have Megas, but the one that needs one the most is (wait for it) Dunsparce!

I did finally 100% Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury and Super Mario Bros. Wonder. I did 3D World first, but I recommend starting with Wonder, because it's easier and you don't have to beat every course with every character like in 3D World.

Right now I'm playing Pokémon Shield to get a ton of Legendaries (because in the future it might be nice to say "every Legendary in one game"). I'm definitely playing Echoes of Wisdom when it comes out (which I don't expect to be as good as Tears of the Kingdom, but could get into my Top 10), and the new Mario & Luigi, which comes out the day after my birthday!

Quiz Time! What kind of board would I like to see in the new Mario Party? Answer next time!

HAPPY 10-YEAR NF-IVERSARY, REBECCA!

What's the usual award for employees who put in 10 years of service working for the same company? Some kind of trophy? A plaque with their name engraved on it? A big sheet cake dropped off in the break room and an email announcement to everyone to head there to grab a piece at 2:00?

Well, since the NF team is scattered around the world without a central home office where everyone can congregate, I suppose I need to figure out some different way of saying a special thanks to our own Rebecca Rudranath for her full decade of faithful writing about video games to fill these pages. How about some surprise promotion for her other video game-related content creation: her Twitch channel!

Everyone, check out **Twitch.tv/JewelryJelly**! That's where Rebecca streams several times each week, making her way through the same kinds of cozy quests and role-playing adventures you've come to learn are her preference throughout our last 62 issues. Her streams are cheerful, welcoming and have a great visual look too, as seen above – I love the pixel-art heart frames and overall color scheme. (I may even be *jealous*. Is that the kind of jelly that the name JewelryJelly is referencing?)

As of this writing, Rebecca's journeying through the Pixel Remaster of Final Fantasy V, as well as Zenless Zone Zero, an RPG that is not yet available on Nintendo's platforms. But if and when a port of it gets announced, I know who'll be getting that preview assignment!

THE PLAYER'S POLL

Congratulations to **Rachel K.**, the winner of our most recent Player's Poll! Your new chance to win is below, and this time around we're interested to read your responses to three questions about games featuring brotherly bonds!

QUESTION #1

There are lots of different sets of brothers that have been introduced in video games over the years. Which bros do you think are the best?

QUESTION #2

A new Mario & Luigi RPG is on the way in November! Have you ever played any of the older entries? If so, which one was your fave?

QUESTION #3

If Mario and Luigi had a third brother, what would his name be and what would he look like? (Bonus points if you send in artwork of your idea.)

Send your responses to **NintendoForceLucas@gmail.com** with the subject line "Player's Poll for Issue #74" – this time, one reader whose answers are picked for print will win the new Mario & Luigi: Brothership on its release date!

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BY JOHN-CHARLES HOLMES

NEWS

The Switch Makes a Final Push

When it's all said and done, where will the Switch lifetime sales total land?

"GONE GOLD" IS a phrase often used by video game companies to signify that a particular project has completed development and is nearing the finish line. It seems only fitting, then, that what is likely the last iteration of the Nintendo Switch as we know it is a golden Switch Lite. The Switch's time is almost finished, and it will return to where it began one final time.

Dubbed the Nintendo Switch Lite: Hyrule Edition, this special version of the console will feature a shiny golden color all around, black buttons and Legend of Zelda design motifs on the front and back. The Hylian Crest is included on the back of the system while the Triforce sits underneath the right stick on the front. It will cost $209.99 at launch.

The console will go on sale on September 26 alongside the upcoming game The Legend of Zelda: Echoes of Wisdom, which will feature Zelda assuming the role of protagonist in a new adventure. (Flip ahead to our preview of it on Page 44!) The system doesn't come with a copy of the game, and just as a reminder, the Switch Lite can only be played as a handheld.

The Hyrule Edition's design is stylish and simplistic, and also serves as a callback to the Switch's beginnings. The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild was a launch title when the console released back in 2017, and it provided the perfect starting point for the Switch's overwhelming success over its seven-plus year run.

Perhaps the Hyrule Edition, with its sleek aesthetic and Legend of Zelda theme, will be what allows the Switch to claim the No. 1 spot in terms of overall console hardware sales! The PlayStation 2 holds the top spot at 155 million units sold, with the Nintendo DS not far behind at 154.02 million. The Switch is in third place currently, with 143.42 million sales as of June 30.

I think it's a question of when, not if, the Switch surpasses the PS2 and DS, but will it sell around 11.6 million more units and get there before the Switch's successor debuts? Maybe. We can certainly speculate.

Recent numbers show Nintendo sold 2.1 million Switch consoles between April 1 and June 30 this year. If they continue to sell at that rate, then the Switch wouldn't claim the No. 1 spot by March 31, 2025.

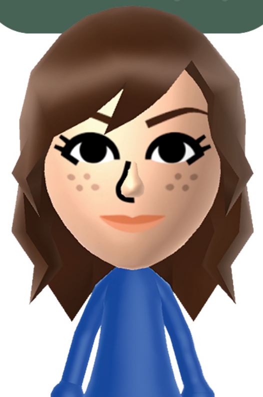
That date is significant because, according to Nintendo President Shuntaro Furukawa, the Switch's successor will be announced sometime before the end of the company's fiscal year, on that date. Also, there have been plenty of reports from this year suggesting that the Switch's successor will launch sometime in the first half of 2025.

My estimate using the April 1-June 30, 2024 figures doesn't factor in the presence of this new, shiny Switch Lite, which is sure to attract sales from new players and dedicated collectors alike. I think it's safe to assume that this Hyrule Edition will be the final special version of any of the Switch 1 hardware revisions to be created and marketed. That finality might draw in a few more buyers too.

A possible boom in sales due to the holiday season is also likely. (A price drop for the Switch would certainly help sales too, if you ask me.)

I'd say the milestone is certainly in reach for the Switch sooner rather than later, and it'll be both exciting and bittersweet to see how the career of this mighty console comes to a close. — **MAGGIE**

> "There are millions of reasons why the Switch is a special console for players all around the world. For me, it's the first console I got to preview and review games for in this very magazine, and it'll always have a special place in my heart because of that. All that said, I can't wait to see how Nintendo will tackle its next console. Hopefully we won't have to wait too much longer for its reveal! – **MAGGIE**"



A Look Inside the Nintendo Museum

Accepting its first visitors beginning on October 2!

GO AHEAD AND check current prices on flights to Japan. I'll wait.

. . . All good? OK, now you should have some sense of whether or not a trip to the new center of the Nintendo universe is within your budget or not.

The Nintendo Museum! Announced to be in the works three years ago and targeted at that time for a 2024 opening, its construction was completed almost exactly on the original schedule and it will indeed open to the public this year. On October 2!

Located in Kyoto and built on the same site where the company first began manufacturing playing cards almost exactly 135 years ago, the Museum will house a complete celebration of that entire history, with exhibits indeed dating all the way back to 1889. Modern games will teach attendees about hanafuda cards and even let them design their own as souvenirs.

Moving forward through the eras, there will be displays packed with all of the company's mid-1900s products, which ranged from board games to toy rifles to baby strollers! (I never knew about the baby strollers, I'll admit.)

But the biggest draw, of course, will be all of the video games. Nintendo has curated what looks to be the complete first-party selection: Every game they've ever made, including every regional variation, will be at least viewable, while many will be playable. The most fun way to play looks to be a room full of comically oversized controllers! More than one player will have to work together to reach all the buttons on these titanic game pads. (And the motion-control Wii Remotes look hilarious. Playing with them looks like picking up and moving a couch!)

We don't have the page space to print images of everything here, but Nintendo has you covered with a new Museum Direct video. Seek it out! Watching it may, sadly, be the closest many of us get to experiencing the Museum in person. But by golly, I'm going to try to get there! **— LUCAS**

Splatoon 3 Hits a New High Note

The upcoming Grand Festival Splatfest has inspired a fresh wave of Splatoon series merch, including new amiibo!

TOUTED AS THE "grand finale" of all of Splatoon 3's Splatfests, the "Past vs. Present vs. Future" Grand Festival will be different from the others in that it will shake up the main lobby and the options will be represented by groups instead of individual characters. The Squid Sisters, Callie and Marie, will represent Past, Off the Hook's Pearl and Marina will be Present and the Deep Cut crew will rep the Future. The 72-hour event will run from September 13th to the 16th . . . but its merch will live forever!

Three shirts representing the three different team options will go on sale in September, alongside four newly announced amiibo! *New amiibo in 2024, you say?* Yes! The brand continues! The Callie and Marie Alterna set comes with the Squid Sisters duo in their outfits from Splatoon 3's single-player campaign. Marie sports her parasol and a white dress, while Callie's in all black. The Marina and Pearl Side Order set plays the same game, giving the pair their apparel from Splatoon 3's DLC. Marina has an orange suit with headphones while Pearl wears a puffy jacket, dress and boots. In-game, tapping one of these will make you friends with the character, allowing you to take pics with them and snag some gear. You can also use the amiibo to allow your gear to travel to another Switch or for quick gear changes on your system. Combine that with the previously released Deep Cut set, and you'll be able to recreate the concert!

A MyNintendo sweepstakes tied to the event will also have even more merch. Five winners will receive all three team shirts and a metal sublimation art print featuring all of the hosts for the Grand Festival. A wristband featuring the event logo has also been released as a physical reward that users can spend Platinum Points to purchase. They really went all-out for this last big event of Splatoon's third generation!

All-New Ness

Happy 30th Anniversary to Mother 2!

NEW MERCH HAS spawned from two recent events in Japan put on by the Hobonichi Mother Project. The Music of Mother concert brought us guitar picks in a tin and a towel, while a pop-up gallery had printed transcripts of the games, a Phase Distorter pouch, a Tonzura Bros. lunchbox, towels and shirts. But none compared to this eight-inch soft vinyl figure that was created in limited quantities for a lottery sale. The figure comes with a bat and a PK Flash effect piece, and the sole of one shoe has Ness' name engraved on it, written by creator Shigesato Itoi! This one will remain a limited and very coveted item, for sure.

BY BRETT MARTIN

Ganondorf Revived Again

. . . this time in a fierce-looking new figma form!

THE ABSOLUTELY FEARSOME Ganondorf from Tears of the Kingdom is getting a fully rehydrated figma from Good Smile in Q4 of 2025. (I guess the rehydrating process takes a while.) In the meantime, we can marvel at his majesty! He also comes with several battle implements, including a Gloom Sword, Gloom Spear and the Demon King's Bow. He also gets a scabbard and an arrow, and he'll come with another Gloom effect piece for added terror. It's an $85 buy-in for this bad boy. As long as there aren't any Gloom Hands included, I'm in!

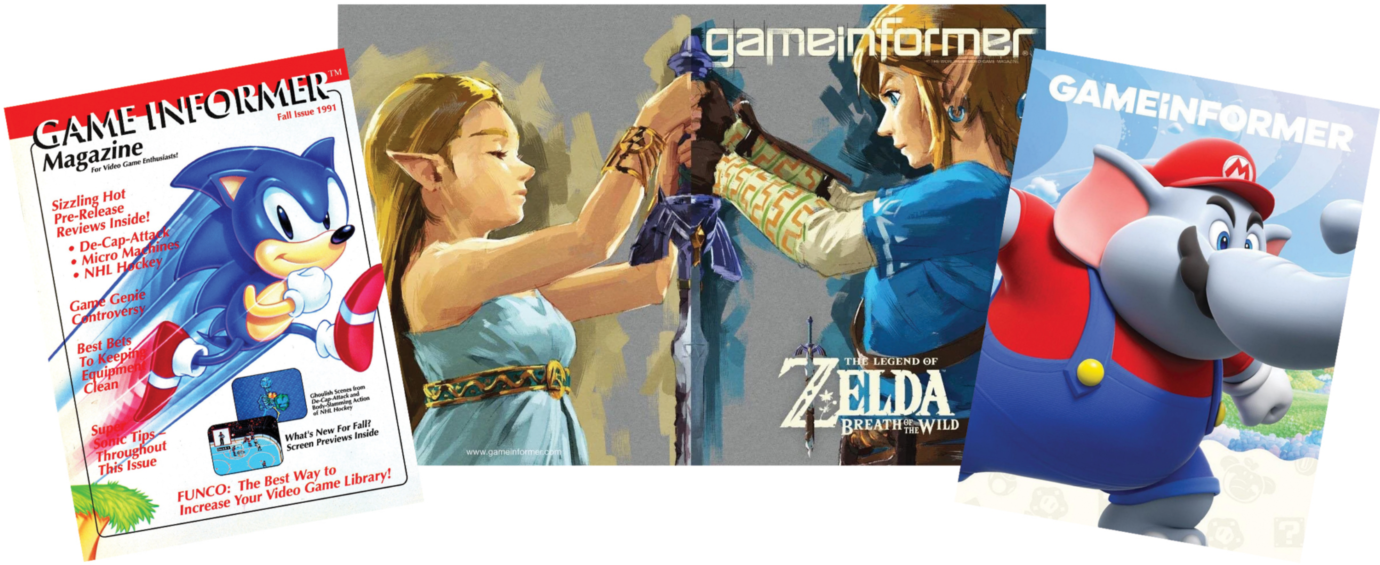
LEGO is Going a Little Bit Crazy

The ongoing Super Mario and Sonic the Hedgehog product lines are getting some bold new additions.

THE RIVALRY BETWEEN the Mario and Sonic brands is playing out again – this time in LEGO form!

The Tails' Adventure Boat set, Knuckles and the Master Emerald Shrine set and Super Sonic vs. Egg Drillster set all came out this summer. But the most eye-catching new addition to the Sonic line will be the huge Shadow the Hedgehog head (seen below), which will join the product line on October 1 for $69.99.

Not to be outdone, the LEGO Super Mario product line will be adding a pixelated Mario on Yoshi set, also releasing October 1, for $129.99. Combining classic and Technic pieces as many of these special Nintendo sets have done, a crank in the back makes Yoshi look like he's walking along the perilous plains of Super Mario World's Dinosaur Land, and it's also possible to have Yoshi open his mouth and extend his tongue! It's truly a marvel. I also love that they've included Mario's Super Cape to complete the iconic look!



GAME INFORMER SAYS GOODBYE

One of the last of the old guard of American video game magazines has been cancelled without warning.

GAMEPRO WAS THE first to go.

Originally launched in April 1989 – less than a year after Nintendo Power – GamePro endured for over two decades before shipping its final issue in 2011.

Nintendo Power was the next to fall. It got its start the year before GamePro, in 1988, but lasted just one year longer, ending in 2012.

Another of their classic contemporaries? Electronic Gaming Monthly. Begun in 1989 – mere days apart from GamePro – it managed to last all the way until 2014, completing a quarter of a century of continuous publication . . . before calling it quits.

There were others beyond those too, of course. GameFan and Tips & Tricks and some that came along later and focused on one platform in particular, like PSM: 100% Independent PlayStation Magazine and the Official Dreamcast Magazine. All long gone.

Now, one more lies defeated.

On the morning of August 2, 2024, the social media accounts and the official website for Game Informer Magazine posted the following message, with the headline "The Final Level: Farewell from Game Informer."

After 33 thrilling years of bringing you the latest news, reviews, and insights from the ever-evolving world of gaming, it is with a heavy heart that we announce the closure of Game Informer.

From the early days of pixelated adventures to today's immersive virtual realms, we've been honored to share this incredible journey with you, our loyal readers. While our presses may stop, the passion for gaming that we've cultivated together will continue to live on.

Thank you for being part of our epic quest, and may your own gaming adventures never end.

Quite a load of bologna, eh?

I don't know whose "heavy heart" that text could've been referring to, because the whole thing comes off as soulless (and could very well have been written by A.I.). If the people who made the call to end Game Informer had actually felt bad about their decision, then, I don't know, maybe they would have told the actual staff of the magazine ahead of time?

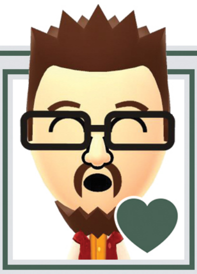
But no! Seeing that post passed around online was how several of G.I.'s team members apparently found out that they were no longer employed. It's not the first time something like that has happened, though. Game Informer was owned by GameStop, the struggling video game retailer who in recent years has become most known for its meme stock price and filling its retail shelves with Funko Pops instead of video games. They've slammed Game Informer with layoffs out of the blue several times before.

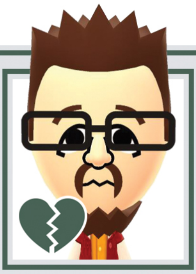
This time they just finally decided to pull the rest of the rug out from under everyone who was left there. It's reprehensible.

Game Informer began in 1991 and published over 360 issues through what suddenly became their final one here in 2024, outlasting by over a decade all its old competitors that once fought it for shelf space in the '90s. The magazine was not known for its Nintendo system coverage – Switch was regularly sidelined in recent years in favor of the flashiest games on Xbox and PlayStation platforms – but there were occasional exceptions. The G.I. team worked directly with the developers of Breath of the Wild to make the unique piece of art seen above in 2017, and their final Nintendo cover story was less than a year ago: Super Mario Bros. Wonder.

Game Informer will be more than missed. I wish it could've had a worthy finale, for all involved. **– LUCAS**

Great!
The Nintendo Museum opening as scheduled.





Oh.
Game Informer getting axed after 33 years.

FORECAST

A meteorological look at the biggest game and DLC releases currently scheduled to debut in the next few months.

IT'S GETTING LOCALIZED after all! This new adventure from Good-Feel, which debuted last year in Japan with the title Otogi Katsugeki Mameda no Bakeru: Oracle Saitorou no Sainan!!, was the subject of an Import Review two issues ago since we didn't think this announcement was ever coming. But it did! Bakeru (that's now its extremely shortened Western name) will go on sale in the Switch eShop on September 3. Grab it! It's great!

OUR COVER GAME for this Leading Ladies issue is the game that will finally let Zelda lead in the series that's always been named after her! (Non-canon stories notwithstanding.) Echoes of Wisdom officially goes on sale on September 26, and we've got a large preview prepared for your perusal beginning on Page 44.

AS WE HEAD into October, the hits will just keep coming! A brand-new sequel in the Mario Party series is set to make its debut on October 17. (Or is this specifically meant to be the second game in the *Super* Mario Party series?) Names can get confusing when a game brand has been around for over a quarter of a century and has nearly 20 separate installments. Read more on Pages 50 and 51!

IF YOU'RE FLIPPING back through your copy of NF #71 to re-read our Mameda no Bakeru review, give a second look to our preview of this new TMNT title as well, since it's finally got a release date too: October 18! My boys and I recently rewatched the Mutant Mayhem movie and have also started on the Tales of the TMNT series to get ourselves ready!

FLIP BACK ONE more issue to NF #70 for our first look at this next release, Sonic X Shadow Generations, which uniquely serves as a remake/port of Sonic Generations from 2011, but is also infused and interwoven with tons of brand-new Shadow content that kind of also makes the whole thing a new game? We'll learn the full extent of what's old and what's new when the final game debuts on October 25.

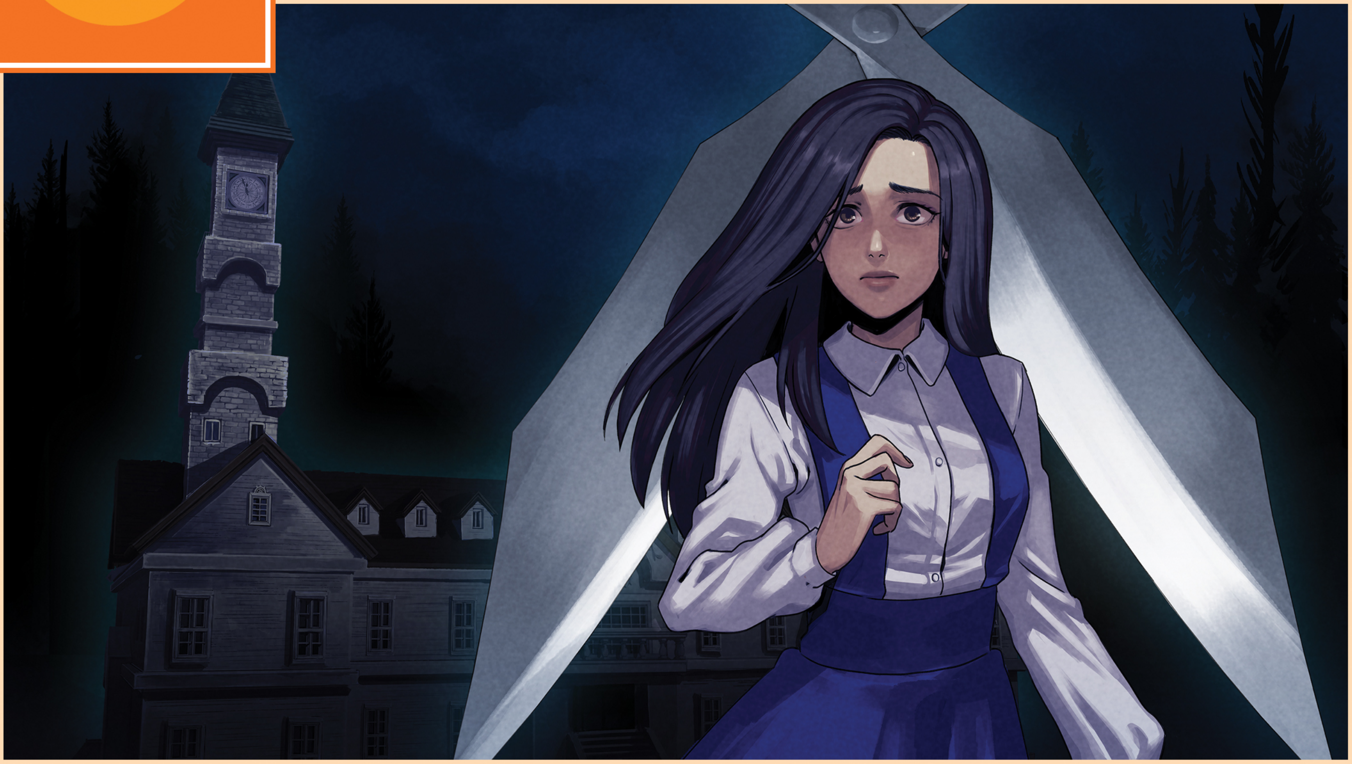
LASTLY, ANOTHER NEW leading lady will step into her own spotlight in this latest installment in the Ys series, which we've been looking forward to for a while. It's also arriving on October 25! All of you gamers whose Venn diagrams overlap with both Sonic and Ys fandoms will have a terrible decision to make as Halloween draws near!

> The addition of an English-localized version of Mameda no Bakeru is just a fresh cherry on top of what's shaping up to be a truly sweet final holiday shopping season for Switch 1. A new Zelda, new Mario Party, new TMNT and Sonic and Ys and even more hits set to drop beyond the end of October? Parents, you've got a lot of great gift-giving options to choose between this year. Get those kiddos something good! They deserve it! — LUCAS

THIS COLUMN HAS become less of a Forecast and more a recent weather report about new NSO releases, hasn't it? Oh well! I need a spot to sometimes draw attention to notable additions to that digital subscription service, so this one just has to do.

Newly notable now? The first three games in the Densetsu no Starfy series! (A.K.A. The Legendary Starfy.) North America only ever got one game in this saga localized into English: the fifth (and currently still final) installment, which was released for the DS in 2009. Now American players can finally experience the origins of the Starfy brand!

. . . In their original language. These games have not been translated. But they're still worth giving a spin, so don't be scared to dive right in!



TURNING BACK THE CLOCK

Western audiences will finally get to experience the story of a trailblazing leading lady thanks to Clock Tower: Rewind.

A WHOLE NEW AUDIENCE will soon be introduced to leading lady Jennifer Simpson and her quest to escape from a spooky mansion and a violent stalker. Clock Tower, a 16-bit survival horror game that debuted in 1995 on Super Famicom in Japan, will come to international audiences for the first time this Fall via an enhanced version called Clock Tower: Rewind.

The game tells the tale of Jennifer, a teenage orphan who, along with other young girls, are adopted by a wealthy man named Simon Barrows and take up residence in his mansion. Soon after, Jennifer finds herself hunted by “Scissorman,” who deftly wields a giant pair of scissors. To survive, she must escape his pursuit, and depending on her success or failure, multiple endings can occur.

Players control Jennifer via a point-and-click system. She can walk, run, hide, interact with objects and set traps. Most notably, Jennifer can’t really fight Scissorman directly, so she must take a defensive approach in this conflict in order to survive.

This concept came straight from specific horror films that Clock Tower creator Hifumi Kono had enjoyed at the time, according to an interview he did with GamesRadar.

“When I created Clock Tower, I drew from what fascinated me about horror films like Phenomena and Suspiria,” he said in the interview.

“The suspense of being chased and the thrill of hiding from a killer while holding your breath – neither of these aspects existed in video games at the time. That’s why I felt it was worth depicting them.”

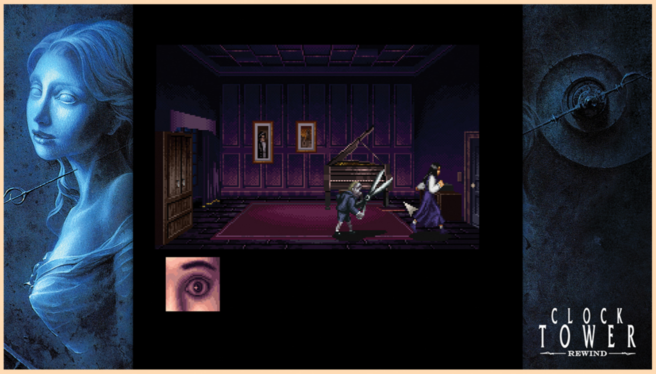
Clock Tower: Rewind will feature two modes for players to experience, according to a PlayStation blog post from Mariel Cartwright. (See Page 61!)

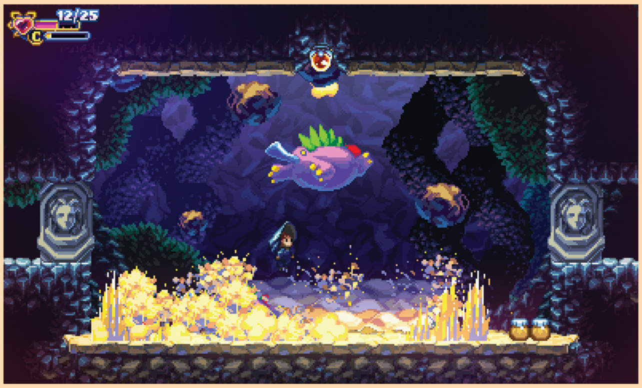
In Original Mode, you play the game as it was in 1995 without any extra features (other than the newly translated text).

Rewind Mode includes additional content, both from old and new sources. It will have features from Clock Tower’s 1997 PlayStation port called The First Fear, including more enemies, cutscenes and places to hide. It also offers new music, animated comics with voiceover, quality-of-life improvements and gameplay enhancements, which add more to both Jennifer and Scissorman’s arsenals. Jennifer will be able to run on stairs, hide more often and use weapons, while Scissorman will be able to pursue her more effectively and access more areas of the mansion.

The original Clock Tower helped lay the foundation of survival horror gaming nearly 30 years ago. As 2024’s spooky season approaches, it’ll get another chance to make an impact on horror fans all around the world. True to its name, the timing couldn’t be more perfect! **— MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: LIMITED RUN GAMES DEVELOPERS: WAYFORWARD & SUNSOFT RELEASE: FALL 2024 RATING: M





A Decade in Development

Whatever happened to Heart Forth, Alicia?

WHEN WE DECIDED to make this issue a sequel to our Leading Ladies-themed NF #11 from a decade ago, I flipped back through that 10-year-old issue to give myself a reminder of what was going on in the world of Nintendo circa 2014. I came across our preview of Hearth Forth, Alicia. I remembered being so excited for that adventure – an indie-developed Metroidvania that had done well for itself in raising funds on Kickstarter earlier in 2014 – and I kicked myself for forgetting about it and never playing the final game. I must've missed it! Surely it came out in 2015 or 2016 or something and its release just flew all the way under my radar.

. . . Nope!

Heart Forth, Alicia, apparently, is still in development. It's been over a decade now since its developers collected their crowdfunded funds to finish work on the adventure, and the game is still not done.

Not only that, it looks like it still has a long way to go! Creator Alonso Martin has still been posting development updates to the old Kickstarter page once every six months or so, acting as if all is well. But, bro, your targeted release date was less than a year after the campaign ended. How has it already been *10?*

I haven't always been entirely on time with my own creative projects. There have been a few of our NF issues that I've had to bump back production on for a few days, or a week tops. And the Impact of Iwata audiobook ended up taking a lot longer to pull together than I planned. I can understand a reasonable degree of delay. But pushing your product launch back and back and back again for over a decade is pretty wild to me.

For what it's worth, the game does still look interesting, and I'd be morbidly fascinated to finally try it out if it miraculously ever does actually cross its finish line. But at this point it seems more likely that this game is falling into the same category as the likes of George R.R. Martin's final Game of Thrones books – things that once looked promising, but will now never really be released. **– LUCAS**

Wii U PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: ALONSO MARTIN
RELEASE: PROBABLY NEVER, AT THIS POINT RATING: LOL

The Simple Life of Hobbits

Become a carefree halfling in the cozy new Tales of the Shire.

NOW, IF YOU ever feel irritated by anything in life – from the pressure of real-world political issues all the way to being annoyed by the non-release of a game you helped fund on Kickstarter back before you had grey hair – then the game industry has developed a calming solution to ease your soul: Cozy games!

It's been heartwarming to see the rise of this category as a larger and larger piece of the industry's overall output, and especially fun to see indie devs thrive in this space. Cozy gaming has come a long way from the earliest Harvest Moons and Animal Crossings, and game designs now are perfectly targeted to making players feel all cuddly inside. So maybe we're ready for the next step? IP-attached, licensed-brand cozy games – like the upcoming Tales of the Shire.

This new game is a unique adaptation of the Lord of the Rings media property – it's entirely ignoring all of the war and the violence and the sneaking into a dragon's hoard to try to find one special shiny gemstone. It's restricting its attention to just the setting of the Shire: the idyllic, lush, laidback home of the Hobbits.

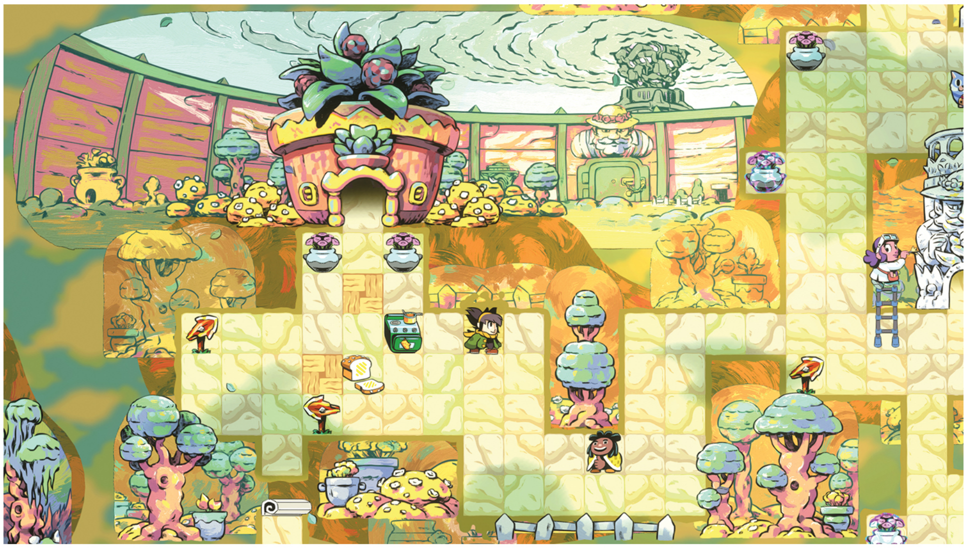
Go back and rewatch the first minutes of The Fellowship of the Ring and you'll instantly fall back in love with this quaint green landscape of rolling hills (and houses built into those same hills). It really does seem like a place where you could kick your feet up, take a long nap under a tree, watch your worries melt away and never feel hurried again.

That seems to be exactly the vibe that Tales of the Shire is going to capture. This is a "live your life at your own pace" game. Explore your surroundings – if you want to. Decorate your house if you like. Eat good food and go fishing and dance with joy – or do none of those things! Being a Hobbit means having no pressing responsibilities whatsoever!

There are some objectives to achieve, of course, if you feel compelled to make actual progress – like working to help your village of Bywater gain recognition as an actual town within Hobbiton as a whole. But even that seems easygoing and fun, because the way to do it is to throw a great festival!

I'm ready for full relaxation. Take me to the Shire, please!**– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: PRIVATE DIVISION DEVELOPER: WĒTĀ WORKSHOP
RELEASE: HOLIDAY 2024 RATING: RP



Reshuffle Your World

ARRANGER: A ROLE-PUZZLING ADVENTURE

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: FURNITURE & MATTRESS
RATING: E

JEMMA'S LIFE IS a bit unorganized.

It's not her fault! She just can't help it. You see, there's something unique about the way she moves.

Every time Jemma takes a step within her world, a part of her world moves right along with her. If she hops out of bed in the morning and tries to walk away from it, the bed starts following right after her. If she tries to approach a friend to chat, they'll be repelled by her advancing presence. And if she leans up against a wall? Well, that's the trickiest part of all: She'll phase right through it, finding herself instantly teleported to the other side of the room!

It's got to be a frustrating way to go through life. But, for us on the outside looking in, Jemma's misfortunate movements make for quite a fun video game.

In Arranger: A Role-Puzzling Adventure, you take control of Jemma and begin to set out on a quest throughout grid-aligned environments. When you move her horizontally, every character and object that is on the same horizontal row with her shifts in the same direction she does, one tile at a time. Same thing on the vertical axis: Moving up or down rearranges everything that's in her current column too.

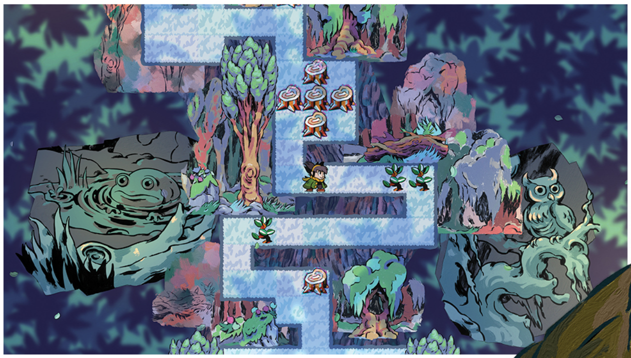
The teleporting thing is a new implementation of "wrap-around," the old-school, arcadey video game element seen in games like Mario Bros. and Ice Climber and Balloon Fight, wherein any characters that disappear off one side of the screen instantly reappear on the opposite side. That kind of quick flipping to the other end of a column or row is used constantly in this game, and wrapping your head around it is key to your success. (For example, in the screenshot above, Jemma's at the top of a column. If you pressed Up in that position, she'd warp all the way down to the bottom of that column.)

You do a lot of pressing Up – and Down and Left and Right – while playing Arranger. In fact, nearly the entire game is played with the D-Pad alone, with an occasional use of the A Button tossed in when Jemma needs to interact with some part of the environment or have a conversation with an adjacent NPC.

. . . If you can get yourself to be adjacent, that is. Simple movement, again, is quirky here – just walking around the starting village is a puzzle unto itself, as if you want to do something like stand next to someone to talk to them, you have to make sure you're not on the same line as they are as you approach, or else they'll be shuffled away from you. (And characters and objects that hit the edge of a row or column also get wrapped around to the other side if Jemma keeps shifting the tiles underneath them in that direction.) Making sure you don't move things that you don't want to move is step one of winning here.

The next step? Moving the things that you *do* want to move in the way you want to move them! Jemma can't pick up and carry anything. Instead, when she needs to do something like attack an enemy with a sword, she has to move the tiles underneath the sword and herself in such a way that the blade ends up aligning itself with the foe – then making one last shift so its pointy end plunges right into their gloomy bodies.

"Now," you might be asking, "how can she move a sword without also moving the monster she means to attack?" You're beginning to get it, dear reader! The answer is Static.



A combination gameplay gimmick and story-advancing plot device, Static is a glowing, evil energy that swirls around some characters and objects in the world of Arranger and makes those people and things fully immune to Jemma's movements. Static is the magical embodiment of an unwillingness to move or change in any way – and Jemma, who's all about constant change, is on her quest in order to find out the truth about this ever-growing force of conformity and stubborn resistance.

Gameplaywise, Static-infected creatures and things often serve as roadblocks that Jemma has to work around, or find a way to eliminate in order to move forward. Using swords to defeat unmoving monsters is the most common puzzle – once a foe is defeated, some previously blocked part of the pathway forward will be cleared, and you'll be free to move on to the next puzzle.

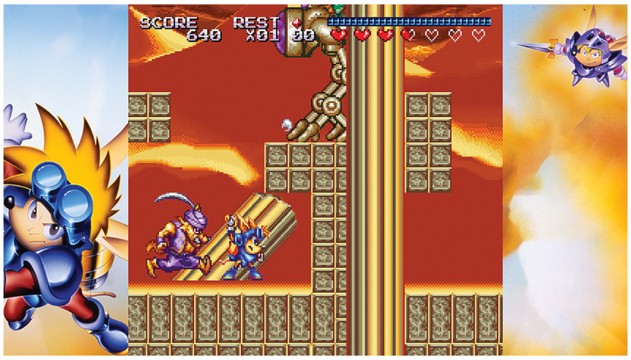
In good video game fashion, the puzzles start off fairly simply but ultimately get more complicated, with extra elements adding new wrinkles. You'll end up juggling multiple moving parts like teleporting doorways and grappling hooks and robotic birds (made to be a clear mockery of/commentary on social media as a whole, and Twitter in particular). As a gamer who's been solving puzzles since the '80s, I didn't have too much trouble working out the right movements to make my way past all of these obstacles and continue the story.

. . . Most of the time. I will admit that a few of these solutions just did not click with my brain, and I was unable to solve them myself. Luckily, though, the developers included some thoughtful accessibility options, like letting you just skip puzzles entirely. You can bypass brainteasers that have you stumped and come back to take them on again later, or else just put them fully in your rearview mirror and move on. I felt good about my decisions to just move forward and not upset myself by struggling too much with the ones that tripped me up, and in the end I think I probably cleared about 95% of the total puzzles without assistance, so that's good enough for me.

Arranger is the debut work of a new indie team calling themselves Furniture & Mattress – and while that's not the smartest name to give yourselves if you want people to be able to find your work with a Google search, their presentation and design decisions within the game have all seemed entirely intelligent. The graphics – from David Hellman, who previously was the artist for Braid – are a particular high point, as everything is just so clean and colorful. Cutscenes pop with the charm of a comic, and the story, led by Nick Suttner from the Celeste team, is another winning one. (Even when it's not making fun of "X".)

If you don't have time to play Arranger, you should reshuffle your schedule so you do. Jemma's a gem!
– LUCAS

9.0



Sparkster Jets Back into Action!

ROCKET KNIGHT ADVENTURES: RE-SPARKED

AS AN SNES kid, there was one game that always made me jealous of my Sega Genesis-owning friends: Rocket Knight Adventures. Finally, this 16-bit classic is available on a Nintendo platform in a package containing both of its direct sequels, and it's just about as good a collection as I could've hoped for!

This collection contains three classic Konami titles: Rocket Knight Adventures, Sparkster for Sega Genesis and Sparkster for Super NES (yes, those are both completely different games). Unfortunately, this collection does not include 2010's Rocket Knight, leaving this release one game short of being a complete collection. But what is here has never looked or played better.

Rocket Knight Adventures is easily the best game of the bunch: It's an action platformer that's just about as quintessentially Konami as can be. You play as a possum with a jetpack out to rescue a kidnapped princess. You have a cool sword that shoots lasers, while your jetpack can be used in short bursts to blast over walls and quickly plow through enemies. It's a bit chaotic, but that lends to the game's overwhelming charm – as well as its difficulty. All three of the games in this collection are HARD, bordering on unfair, which makes the included save state and rewind features extremely welcome.

RKA includes some truly impressive setpieces and memorable boss battles that pushed the Sega Genesis hardware to its limits. Reflections, background warping, super fast scrolling . . . the game never ceases to impress with its fantastic art direction, music and animation. It is, in my opinion, one of the best games to ever grace Sega's 16-bit platform.

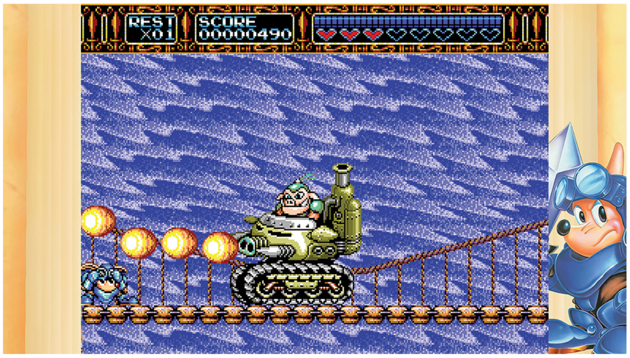
Its follow-ups, though, are a different story. Sparkster for Genesis is what I would consider the low point. It's a decent game, but our hero's sword no longer shoots projectiles, and he now attacks slowly, in a stabbing motion, instead of a quick overhead arc. It makes some interesting changes to the jetpack, including a cool corkscrew attack that can be used for some light puzzle solving, but overall the level design is lacking, the combat isn't fun anymore and the boss encounters are a combination of weird and forgettable. It also suffers from the levels not working within the game's camera restraints, with enemies and traps constantly ready to kill you at a moment's notice, just off-screen.

The Super NES Sparkster doesn't fare a whole lot better. Like its Genesis counterpart, it both looks and sounds great, but it also falls victim to the same off-screen deaths issue. That said, the original release suffered from massive amounts of slowdown, a problem that this new collection fixes almost entirely. Sparkster for SNES retains the speed and laser sword of the first game too, and has some great variety in the later levels, including an amazing top-down scrolling shooter segment!

These games are all well worth playing, and while the extras are a little thin, there's plenty of great, classic action here to justify the price tag. Just be prepared for some serious frustration. They don't make them like this anymore! **– KRIS**

7.5

SWITCH
PUBLISHER: KONAMI
DEVELOPER: LIMITED RUN
RATING: E10+



Suika Game Gets a Remix

PUZZMIX

IN KEEPING WITH the theme of this issue, one of the heroines of Inti Creates' Mega Man-esque Gunvolt franchise has spun off with her very own title!

PuzzMiX stars Lola, companion of Copen, who both first appeared in the Azure Striker Gunvolt series before spinning off into their own pair of titles: the Luminous Avenger iX games. Lola is a small, spherical battle support robot called a Combat Pod who aids Copen in his fights by providing him with EX Abilities. In addition, she can project a more humanoid version of herself, the idol-like Muse, whose songs and powers are able to supplement and enhance Copen's own abilities.

You don't really need to know the whole backstory for Lola to get into PuzzMiX, of course, though it might help you appreciate what it brings to the table just a little bit more. Because the truth is, it doesn't bring much. But, that's by design, so . . . mission complete?

Basically, PuzzMiX is a variation on another physics-based puzzle game, Suika Game (also referred to as "Watermelon Game"). In that title, you drop various round pieces of fruit from the top of the screen in an effort to pair like fruits to turn them into *other* fruits, which grow ever larger in size and take up more of the playfield until you form a watermelon – all while trying to keep all the pieces below the line at the top of the screen. There's no timer. No levels. You just play Suika Game until you either succeed or fail.

That largely describes what PuzzMiX brings to the table too, but there are a few twists involved. For starters, rather than fruit, Lola assumes her different forms from the Gunvolt games, which are not as round as Suika Game's fruits. Rather, they've very angular and jagged, which in itself changes up the gameplay quite a bit, and makes things more challenging.

Further adding to the challenge is that unlike Suika Game, it's up to you to figure out the "Circle of Evolution" of these forms, as the game does nothing to inform you of this. It's not impossible, but the lack of the simple visual chart definitely puts more pressure on you to remember what's going to turn into what as you progress. I had a rough time of it at first, but I started to get a feel for it over time – though it is unintuitive, and would make jumping back in after a long absence more difficult.

One thing that tripped me up often as well was that I would tend to look at the "next" piece, rather than the one that was currently in play, as it feels almost distractingly prominent. But, maybe that was just a "me" issue. Either way, I got past it with a bit of time and focus.

The shapes aren't the only thing to lend this Suika variation a bit of Gunvolt flavor, though: Lola's songs from the series act as the game's soundtrack. You only begin with two, but unlock more as you play, and can cycle between songs at any time. Lola's Muse idol form is also there, and is even given an English voice if you prefer, but she doesn't really say much more than the names of the forms as they appear. Might've been nice if she'd said more.

I hesitate to call PuzzMiX a stripped-down Suika clone, but what it lacks in player-friendly amenities, it does make up for in challenge.
– DAVID

6.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: INTI CREATES RATING: E

Tower Defense is the Best Offense

METAL SLUG ATTACK RELOADED

THE METAL SLUG series is legendary. Mixing action-packed run-and-gun gameplay with a sense of humor and positively gorgeous pixel animations, the original games by SNK quickly became a beloved staple in arcades. So when I saw Marco, Tarma, Eri and my girl Fio marching into battle during June's Direct, I immediately hit up the eShop.

Metal Slug Attack Reloaded, at its core, is a sidescrolling tower defense game. Clearly, this is a different beast than the Contra-like chaos of yesteryear, and that's fine! But it's also a port of a gacha-based mobile game, with all that entails, unfortunately.

I'm getting ahead of myself a bit. The gameplay here is fairly straightforward: Each mission has you hiring allies to automatically march ahead and attack the enemy's troops and base, while your foe is doing the same to you. Whoever's base falls first loses, so the challenge is in managing your limited resources to pick the right soldiers for the job.

When it works, it's fun enough, as desperately trying to fight off a wave of baddies while making split-second decisions can lead to some frantic moments. It also looks beautiful due to pulling most of its art from the original games. Even the myriad of new characters fit the existing sprite style pretty well — no small feat (although I don't remember Metal Slug being so full of fanservice).

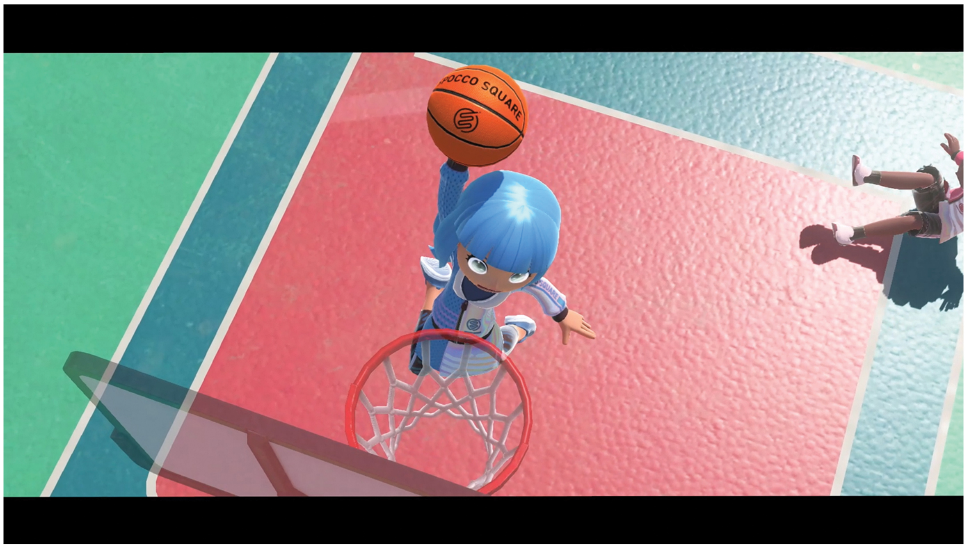
What really drags the whole thing down is the absolute insistence on overdoing it with the RPG/gacha elements. They thankfully removed the microtransactions (all the content is here from the get-go, albeit unlockable), but this is still a game built on repetition. Each one of the hundreds of units has numerous aspects to getting stronger, from giving them items and manually allocating EXP to a separate upgrade system and unlockable skills. I spent way more time here poking around menus and slowly upgrading all this junk than engaging in the actual gameplay, so if you're the type who hates the downtime in stuff like Fire Emblem, this will drive you mad.

What's worse is that it's all required, because wild difficulty spikes will have you hitting walls and backtracking to earlier missions for more loot. At one point, I switched from playing on the dock to using the touchscreen in Handheld Mode, frantically poking at every option in battle as it became available to me and throwing strategy to the wind. And it worked! I blasted through the next dozen levels before getting stuck again, but it made it pretty clear that the gameplay in this title wasn't considered nearly as thoughtfully as it could've been. There's plenty of side content, but it feels even clunkier, with lengthy, tedious and downright nonsensical story scenes that had me yearning for the dialogue-free days of the arcade. And a few text boxes I encountered contained hilariously butchered translations, the likes of which I hadn't seen in decades!

As someone who absolutely loves the first three Metal Slug games, I say turn to those originals to get your fix. Or if you're looking for a new spin, keep an eye out for the upcoming Metal Slug Tactics game, which looks cool. Just avoid going down this grindy rabbit hole. Fio deserves better! **— MATTHEW T.**

5.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SNK RATING: T



DLC PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RATING: E10+

Boom-Shakalaka!

NINTENDO SWITCH SPORTS: BASKETBALL

NINTENDO HAS A knack for finding the most basic form of a sport and exploiting that for quick fun. When you're playing a sports game from Nintendo, you're not expecting the same complexity as when you play a title like NBA 2K24. Nintendo just focuses on the most exciting movements – but Switch Sports' Basketball may take that love of simplicity a bit too far.

This take on the sport is broken down into four positions. Position #1 has you in possession of the ball and trying to make a basket against a defender. You dribble the ball with the Joy-Con, and you can also pass to your teammate. Position #2 is when you are the teammate, trying to get open for a pass. #3 is playing as a defender trying to swat the ball away or block the shot made by the avatar with the ball, and #4 is playing as the other defender, positioning yourself to try to intercept a pass.

Only one of these positions, #1, the ball handler, is exciting. And you must cycle through each position before you get another scoring chance, so who in their right mind is going to pass, even if it's the best way to beat the competition?

Yeah, only Dads whose kids want the ball! Should that defender then succeed in swatting the ball away, though, it's all over and you have to attempt to make the match faster by swatting and blocking until you get back to that first position. It's not that the movements lack precision, or that it doesn't look like basketball, but it's odd when someone swats the ball away or intercepts a pass and they don't continue. The avatars just celebrate for accomplishing their task and then the screen fades. It really makes it feel less like basket-ball and more like competitive drills.

Honestly, the other modes make much more sense, as they're just variations on long-range shooting contests, and they focus on the fun.

Three-Point Challenge has one player shoot three-pointers from four different locations along the three-point line in a timed setting. Three-Point Contest pits four players against each other trying to hit as many three-pointers as possible within the time limit, but everyone shoots at the same time, so it's rapid mayhem. Five-Point Streak is the same as the Contest, but you're aiming to sink five in a row against the other four. This one can be even quicker, but ultimately lasts as long as it takes to complete the task.

All this said, Basketball has become my kids' favorite sport in Nintendo Switch Sports. I have three small kids (7M, 5F and 4M), and they have each had a blast playing together (even when they have to wait their turn, or else be paired with a CPU to fill out a four-player match).

Nintendo Switch Sports' new Basketball mode is rudimentary and it's weird, but it's undeniably fun, especially with four human players. With four who possess similar skills, the game can get really heated, and that's when Nintendo Switch Sports is at its best. **– BRETT**

7.0

Swim, Sail and Soar to Save Your Father

TCHIA

WHAT IF BOTH Breath of the Wild and Super Mario Odyssey were mashed up, and then placed in the world of The Wind Waker? You'd have Tchia – but Tchia is so much more than that!

While it looks and plays much like a PS2-era game, if you can't get past its rudimentary graphics, elements popping in the background as you travel and framerate drops, I feel sorry for you. Because you'll be missing out on a special experience!

We meet Tchia and her Dad, Juxo, on a small, bucolic island near New Caledonia. In fact, the developers, voice actors and composers are all from New Caledonia, and while the landscape has been changed and fantastical elements added, it is an accurate representation of cultures and languages from that area.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: KEPLER INT.
DEVELOPER: AWACEB
RATING: T

After Tchia learns how to navigate her world, her Dad is kidnapped by Pwi Dua, a henchmen of the evil overlord of the area, Meavora. Tchia follows, meets Meavora and fights to get her Dad back.

During the intro, we learn that Tchia is able to possess animals and inanimate objects for a short time using Soul Jump. This feels like a power most game characters get in the late stages of a game! Within the first minutes of attaining the ability, I possessed a bird for an easy way to traverse large expanses, I jumped into a dolphin to zoom effortlessly in the water, then hopped into a rock to roll down a hill.

Some had further powers: Boars and dogs can dig, cats and foxes have night vision and cows can . . . poop explosives?! Humor abounds in this game, both in its narrative and gameplay, but there are also some very dark elements. (The game provides a way to skip any portion due to difficulty or dark themes.)

The archipelago is chock-full of interesting things to do, and is so open at the onset that it can feel intimidating – but the devs do a lovely job of introducing gameplay elements, people and locales. There are a lot of fetch quests, but they have meaning attached to them.

To speak to certain people, you'll need items for a costume or offering. Other times, you'll be playing your magical ukelele at village parties or shooting things with your slingshot.

Whittling and placing totems gives you shrine access to enhance your Soul Jump and Soul Throw, the latter being the attack for Meavora's fabric golems that Tchia encounters on the islands. Much like a Bokoblin camp, you need to clear them out, but you can surprise them by summoning a fire thrower or possessing a burning log.

As Tchia progresses, customizations are unlocked, and the sheer amount of things that you can have her wear is staggering. Many of the items have special attributes, giving Tchia heightened stamina or stats, but some are just for fun, like clown noses and chicken suits.

Challenge trophies from various locales can be fed into a claw machine to get more, and this can soak up a lot of your time. The game is around 12 to 15 hours long, but exploring the map is very fun – especially with the right Soul Jumps – and there are plenty of worthwhile distractions.

$30 on the eShop may seem steep, but this little gem of a game has a lot of mileage and a big heart.
– BRETT

9.5

9.0

In Service of the ALLMOTHER

1000xRESIST

THERE'S A CERTAIN beauty and confusion when experiencing a non-linear story.

Seeing narrative events out of order can be jarring, but when those moments of realization hit after getting the appropriate context, it's powerful, and you have to see what's next.

Sci-fi indie adventure game 1000xRESIST pulls off this concept almost flawlessly and kept me on the edge of my seat throughout my 12-hour playthrough.

1000xRESIST transports you to a post-apocalyptic world that was ravaged by a deadly disease brought by aliens. You play as Watcher, who lives underground and serves the ALLMOTHER alongside her sisters, who each have their own role to play: Knower, Fixer, Healer, etc.

The premise sounds interesting, but the story is made even better by examining how the world ended up in this state – and how it's still changing. The game does this via Communions, where Watcher connects to someone and sees specific memories from their perspective.

These Communions provide the foundation of 1000xRESIST's atmosphere and gameplay. The setting in the game's present day includes a futuristic hub called the Orchard, but during Communions, you're taken all over, from a high school to desolate caves to the remnants of Earth left behind.

Navigation can be challenging, and I think a more consistent map would have benefited the experience. The Switch port also exhibits fuzziness in some areas, but considering devs said they had to mostly rebuild their game for the console, I think what they achieved was pretty impressive.

A gorgeous soundtrack accompanies the journey, and it features a little bit of everything, with tense techno numbers and solemn piano melodies to name a few.

Gameplay elements include exploring, examining objects, talking to NPCs, warping across environments via platforming mechanics and, most importantly, jumping back and forth between time periods within these memories.

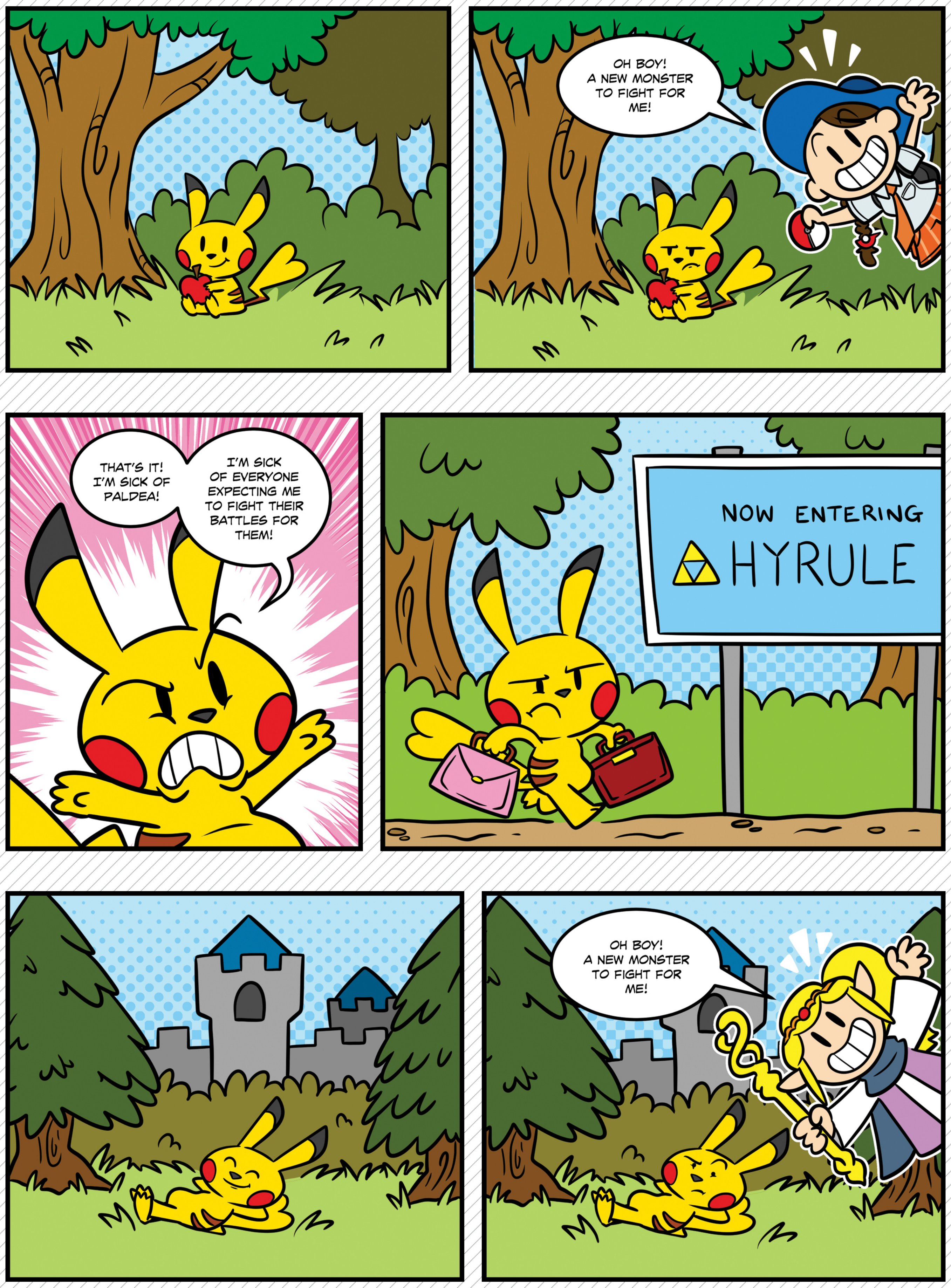
For example, during one of the Communions, Watcher sees the lives of a Chinese family who moved to Canada in the aftermath of the Hong Kong protests. This is one of many instances where the game uses current events as inspiration for its overall story.

Watcher views this family's experiences over several years – and out of order. In one scene, a young girl and her parents are moving into their new apartment. After jumping to the next period, the girl is now a teenager who must make sure her mother doesn't hurt herself while sleepwalking, a symptom of the mother's trauma from the protests.

1000xRESIST is built on these many isolated moments, woven together to create a fascinating and emotional story that tackles a myriad of topics like diaspora, generational trauma and racism.

It's heavy; it doesn't shy away from confronting issues that are very much still relevant today, and it shows how art has the profound power of illustrating someone's experience and making us care deeply about it. And hopefully care enough to make positive changes to the world around us! **– MAGGIE**

SWITCH 斜陽過客
PUBLISHER: FELLOW TRAVELLER
DEVELOPER: SUNSET VISITOR
RATING: M



BY MATTHEW LOFFHAGEN

LEADING LADIES

10 YEARS LATER

A decade ago, we presented 30 of the most influential female stars from throughout Nintendo history. Now let's update our list with new faces who've made a big splash in the last 10 years!

ISABELLE

KICKING OFF THIS extension to our original 30-character list of Leading Ladies from 10 years ago is a character who did already exist, 10 years ago, but who hadn't yet made nearly as much of a name for herself at that point. A decade later, though, she's become one of Nintendo's most famous faces, and we absolutely must honor her first and foremost!

Isabelle was originally introduced in 2013's Animal Crossing: New Leaf. The fourth installment in the mainline Animal Crossing series, New Leaf once again cast players as humans who move to a town full of animals to begin a new life. But unlike its three predecessors, New Leaf didn't restrict players to just being common residents – instead, it let us become the mayor! Isabelle made her debut to guide players through this role transition, as she served as the mayor's assistant/tutorial character, always willing to lend a helping hand.

New Leaf soared to success due in large part to Isabelle, and Nintendo instantly took notice that they had a new superstar on their hands. She was quickly invited to become a crossover character, as she was added to the playable roster of drivers in Mario Kart 8 and then joined the cast of fighters in Super Smash Bros. Ultimate. She reappeared in Animal Crossing spin-offs like Happy Home Designer, Pocket Camp and amiibo Festival. She was front-and-center once more for Animal Crossing: New Horizons, which gained global mainstream popularity beginning in Spring 2020. (Helped along by the planet-wide shutdowns and social distancing brought on by the Covid pandemic.) It turns out that everyone all around the Earth really responds well to a cheerful, helpful puppy dog in the best of times and the worst of times! Isabelle has been a brilliant addition to our world. – **LUCAS**

DEBUT:
JUNE 2013

MARINA

WHILE BEING A playable protagonist is the most common way to be a leading lady in gaming, there's also a lot to be said for sitting out of the action and working as a brand manager for a franchise. That's the role that Pearl and Marina, also known as Off the Hook, took on for Splatoon 2 in 2017. They had the unenviable job of replacing the fan-favorite Squid Sisters from the original game on the Wii U, but they managed to make the most of it, helping the sequel to sell almost three times as much as its predecessor and making it the top-selling title in the series to date!

So, Marina is a proven crowd pleaser, but it's the way she broke the color barrier for first-party Nintendo titles that truly makes her stand out. While she's clearly not a human being, her skin color and afro-like head tentacles are coded to make her read as a Black woman. More so, her story, and the story of all the Octolings in Splatoon 2, feels like a subtle allegory for the Black American experience. While Splatoon 1 offered up some subversively progressive lore about apocalyptic climate change, the sequel showed its copious octopus kids as a literal underclass. Previously perceived as villains, we learned they were pushed down and kept out by the surface-dwelling Inklings. Marina was not only a universal figurehead for all of the Octolings, but she's also the first Black-coded woman to play a definitive leading role in a Nintendo-published title. She even got her own amiibo! Twice!

While the majority of headliners are still Italian plumbers or Hyrulian warriors, Marina's success proves that Nintendo's regular roster of mascots is slowly expanding toward greater levels of diversity, equity and inclusion. – **JONATHAN**

DEBUT:
JULY 2017

LITERATURE CLUB

HEROISM ISN'T ALWAYS about taking up arms against evil.

Aside from a brief content disclaimer at the start, nothing would lead newcomers to believe that Doki Doki Literature Club is anything but a cute albeit generic dating sim. Part of its deception is introducing its four female leads as commonplace anime archetypes, only for the layers to peel away and reveal vulnerabilities that hit uncomfortably close to home. Sadly for those expecting a deeper dive into the behavioral sciences, such potential is abandoned in favor of fourth-wall shenanigans and unsettling imagery – which isn't to say DDLC doesn't deserve its acclaim, simply that it missed an opportunity to tackle a traditionally stigmatized subject.

Then Doki Doki Literature Club Plus! arrived in June 2021, and with it a more satisfying resolution for our co-ed clubmates. Across a series of horror-free side stories that each chronicle the formation of the titular club, we gained a deeper understanding of each girl's mental health struggles: Club president Monika, whose perfectionism causes her to second-guess every action. Vice president Sayori, whose bubbly and outgoing demeanor belies her crippling depression. Fantasy novel enthusiast Yuri, who exhibits signs of being on the spectrum. And manga lover Natsuki, forced to suppress her desires due to an overbearing father and constant negging from her childhood friend group.

Within the club, these girls discover a support network that they never realized they needed. And though their conflicting personalities spark plenty of tension at the outset, they're able to navigate the web of emotions through patience and trust, learning to love not only one another but also themselves. It's a touching lesson that allowing yourself to be vulnerable with others takes immense courage - the mark of a true hero. And the Literature Club girls? They're *my* heroes. – **TONY**

DEBUT:
SEPTEMBER 2017

MADELINE

ON THE SURFACE, Celeste is a tough-as-nails 2D platformer from 2018, challenging the player to climb a massive mountain packed with increasingly impossible-looking levels. It's masterfully designed from top to bottom – but its meta-narrative makes it rise to the level of a timeless classic.

Embedded in its tale of perseverance and self-acceptance is a semi-autobiographical reflection on the life of creator Maddy Thorson, coming to terms with herself and her gender. Unlike many "empathy games" that sell themselves on giving the players the opportunity to step into the shoes of in-game subjects, Celeste doesn't do anything at the start to clue the player in to the fact that it's about a woman going through a very personal struggle – one that resonates with many people who've historically struggled with fair representation. If it had telegraphed its intentions more clearly, it wouldn't have been as effective at endearing you to its characters, or at drawing in players who would've otherwise avoided a story about grappling with gender identity and depression.

With over 1,000,000 copies sold by 2020, Celeste opened doors for trans women to become leading ladies in more games. Bridget from Guilty Gear Strive was revealed to be a trans woman in 2021, as was Catalyst in Apex Legends in 2022. More recently, Venture from Overwatch 2 became the franchise's first playable nonbinary gendered combatant in 2023, and just this year, Vivian was confirmed to be a trans woman in the Thousand-Year Door remake. While we don't know for sure if Madeline's mainstream success was a direct influence on any of those creative decisions, there's no doubt that she means the world to players all over the world, who deeply relate to her story on multiple levels. – **JONATHAN**

DEBUT:
JANUARY 2018

RING FIT TRAINEE

WHEN Wii FIT released back in 2007, it introduced the world to a digital trainer who was there to help players to get in shape. But for all the good the Wii Fit Trainer did, there was always something missing: a real personality. Wii Fit Trainer wasn't devoid of *all* sense of character, but she was a largely featureless and sterile figure. So when it came time for Nintendo to bring fitness to Switch, they tried something new, and far more colorful, with Ring Fit Adventure.

While the Ring Fit Trainee plays the role of the silent protagonist compared to her partner Ring (who is VERY not silent), she's still bursting at the seams with personality and energy. Wii Fit was always more about balance and posture than strength and cardio, and that game's trainer reflected that. Conversely, the Ring Fit Trainee has big, expressive eyes, and an overall attitude that feels far more relatable than her inexpressive predecessor.

The entire world of Ring Fit Adventure is a wondrous place that does an incredible job of encouraging players to actually get these exercises done, but it's the Trainee herself who really connects the player to that world. She sweats, struggles and celebrates right alongside you, which can go an impressively long way in helping people who have a hard time motivating themselves to keep going when the going gets tough. And that, more than anything, is why she's such an important figure in gaming. It's easy to create a generic, lifeless avatar to tell people how to stretch and remind them to keep going, but it takes a lot more to actually be a part of someone's journey and make them feel not only like they should keep going, but that they actually want to. (Her flaming hair is pretty darn cool, too.) – **KRIS**

DEBUT:
OCTOBER 2019

AYUMI TACHIBANA

GORY, CHARACTER-DRIVEN and text-heavy: three key attributes I would say absolutely do not apply to the bulk of Nintendo's games. And yet the Famicom Detective Club series was just that when it debuted in Japan in 1988. Mystery fans owe it to themselves to check out its first two titles – both remade for the Switch in 2021 – in order to see where some of the earliest visual novel tropes got their start!

Helmed by Metroid's Yoshio Sakamoto, FDC centers around a pair of characters: a young detective whom you name, and his pal Ayumi Tachibana. Ayumi plays an important role in the first game as a sort of Velma-type assistant to the player. She really gets to shine in the second game, though, as the case centers around the death of her best friend, and she goes to considerable (and morally questionable) lengths to find the answers to that mystery. While Ayumi isn't a playable character in either game, she set the standard for gaming "Watsons" who give the player a friendly face to help solve the case. The dynamic of a spirited young woman on your mystery-solving team ended up being adopted by plenty of later VNs down the line, most notably Ace Attorney with Maya Fey, Trucy Wright and others.

That said, she did get her own starring adventure as well, in the relatively obscure BS Detective Club: Lost Memories in the Snow. Sadly, it never released here . . . but if you'd like to play as Ayumi, she's one of the Mystery Mushroom costumes in the original Super Mario Maker! And if you're looking for new mysteries to solve with this sharp-as-a-tack teen, the upcoming FDC sequel Emio - The Smiling Man features Ayumi ready for action, and apparently directly playable at some points. So we won't have to wait long to see her put those detective skills to use again! – **MATTHEW T.**

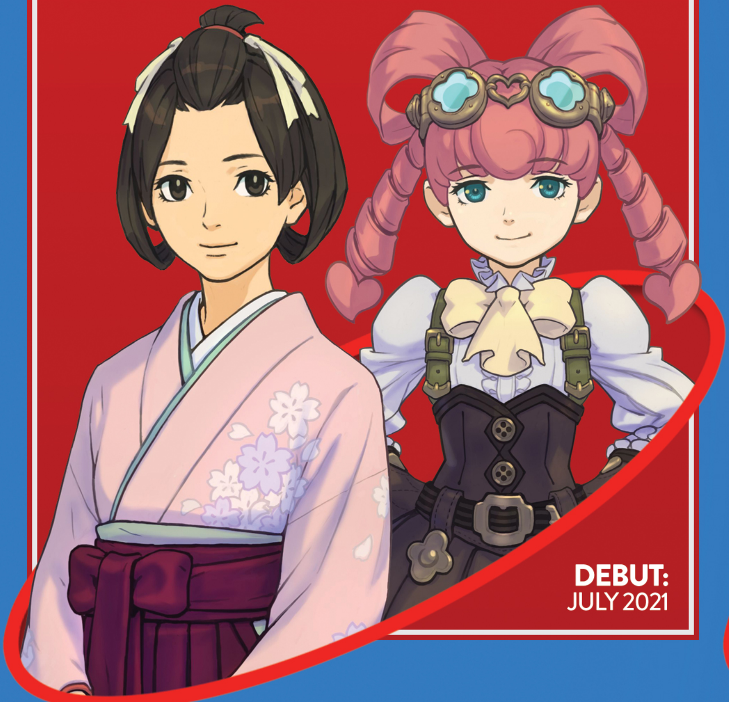
RETURN:
MAY 2021

SUSATO & IRIS

THE ACE ATTORNEY series has its fair share of strong female characters, from the Fey family and their spiritual powers, to Athena Cykes, who is admirable for turning her ultra-sensitive hearing into an advantage in court. In the last 10 years, however, two new characters were introduced that are much more nuanced and developed than many of their modern day counterparts: Susato Mikotoba and Iris Wilson. Their accomplishments put them head and shoulders above their peers, even in The Great Ace Attorney's romanticized settings of Victorian London and Meiji Japan.

At first glance, 16-year-old Susato may come across as a *Yamato nadeshiko* (a term for the "ideal" Japanese woman used in antiquity), but she is every inch a modern woman: She's well learned (how many books does she have hiding up her sleeve?), an accomplished judoka (just ask Ryunosuke Naruhodo) and isn't afraid to defy Japanese law by dressing as a man to defend her best friend in court! Susato may be Ryunosuke's judicial assistant, but she's much more than that – she's his equal, and without her help, he would be totally lost in the labyrinth that is the British legal system.

Pint-sized prodigy Iris Wilson's life mostly consists of domestic duties – such as serving tea for the Sholmes household – but she's a quite accomplished young woman. She's brought the adventures of her adoptive father to a worldwide audience; invented all sorts of useful, ahead-of-their-time gadgets; and even has her medical degree, in honor of the man she believed was her birth father. And all at the tender age of 10! She's quite capable of helping Ryunosuke in his investigations as well, with her natural curiosity and analytical thinking a good match for him – and a good way of dealing with her somewhat erratic father. – **REBECCA**



DEBUT:
JULY 2021

SAM

THE UNFLAPPABLE LITTLE girl known as Sam is one of the main protagonists in Eastward, a role-playing adventure about physical travel, mental travel and time travel. This impossibly bubbly white-haired social butterfly (with mysterious powers) is willing to meet and help anyone, even if that person doesn't have the best of intentions. Slowly throughout the game, Sam's power grows. At first, she can just stun enemies, but later she can stun whole groups, create energy shields and replenish health. In RPG terms, she's a light mage! (And her companion John would be a warrior.)

John discovered Sam in an experimental tank while mining and subsequently adopted her as his daughter. How Sam got there is unknown – and she also has an identical but misanthropic version of herself known as Mother. At first, Sam's focus is on being able to play a video game so she can fit in with her new classmates. Who hasn't been there? But things shift quickly when there's an event at the school and Sam and John essentially get kicked out of town by the mayor. (But it's all for the best because then they can finally explore the world outside of the oppressive Potrock Isle.)

Sam and Mother have an unexplained connection, and while traveling the world Mother tries to manipulate Sam into doing things to further her agenda of making "perfect" humans. Sam and John must also contend with the Miasma – a sort of sentient, caustic goo that wreaks havoc on the world, destroying all it touches. The mystery of the Miasma, Mother, Sam and John is a mangled mess that Sam meets with the innocence of a child, but you should never underestimate her – or her frying-pan-wielding father! – **BRETT**

DEBUT:
SEPTEMBER 2021

MIO

WHETHER IT'S DUE to overly sexualized designs or questionable relationship storylines, Xenoblade hasn't always handled its female characters perfectly. However, the series has still brought some amazing heroines to life – with Xenoblade 3 co-protagonist Mio as the best one thus far. In the game, Mio shares the spotlight with Noah, as they lead warring squads who eventually align with each other to face a common enemy. Mio is the oldest of the group, and this role is even more significant because life is short and violent in the world of Xenoblade Chronicles 3.

Mio wrestles with the fact that her 10-year lifespan is almost up, and she's spent most of it in combat due to reasons beyond her control. She fixates on her final months, keeping a diary that counts down her days, but at the same time, she hides this fear from her friends while supporting them. Mio's best and most relatable moments come when this facade drops, and she truly expresses her feelings about the corrupt and bloody world she's been forced into. One example is when, in a rage, she punches a gigantic enemy, sends it flying and screams at it to "stop toying with everyone's lives!"

Mio's character strikes a near-perfect balance of relatability and heroics. She navigates complex emotions that we can all relate to, from fear of death to anxiety, but she's also a strong and compassionate hero, who doesn't hesitate to work toward a better world – even if she won't be around to see it. Mio's portrayal also avoids some problematic tendencies. Her design is tasteful, and she isn't just there to be a romance option for Noah. She's a worthy example of how to do a female lead right, and I hope we see more characters like her, especially in the JRPG space. – **MAGGIE**

DEBUT:
JULY 2022

PENNY

PENNY'S BIG BREAKAWAY is a breakout hit, and with a leading lady this charming, it's not hard to see why! You can tell at a glance that this cheerful gal just wants to entertain – just look at her bright, unique clothes and her entire array of wacky animations!

If you had to sum up Penny in one word, it would probably be "relatable." She's a street performer who specializes in yo-yo tricks, which makes her an artist. And like any artist, she's on an eternal quest to hone her craft.

Sure, she accidentally shamed the emperor during a talent show, and sure, she has to dodge his penguin guards while running all over the world. But who among us hasn't stumbled on our path to improve our art? All of us run into a few snags and hurdles on our own artistic journeys now and then – it's just that poor Penny ended up as a wanted fugitive along the way.

And in her case, some of these hurdles can be literal – it seems like every town on the planet Macaron is some kind of crazy obstacle course! Some days it really does feel like you have to perform a few front flips, spins and swings just to get your work noticed, but that doesn't stop Penny. Even while she's on the lam, she won't pass up an opportunity to busk for a cheering crowd. Now that's dedication!

She may be a silent protagonist, but Penny's actions speak louder than words: Keep trying, meet as many people as you can, help out others, use your skills to make the world a brighter place and, no matter what happens, just keep moving forward! – **LINDSEY**

DEBUT:
FEBRUARY 2024

ARTWORK BY **SUPERALFREDOUNIVERSE**

PAULINE

AFTER ADDING SEVERAL new faces to our Leading Ladies list, let's wrap things up with an update on the career of one Lady who first appeared in the original article 10 years ago. At that time, Pauline was just beginning to be remembered by Nintendo after decades of being almost entirely ignored. She had only ever been seen in the Donkey Kong series as the kidnapped damsel in distress and a scant few cameos elsewhere, but we hoped "maybe one day her star will rise further, perhaps racing in Mario Kart?" Well, Pauline's star has not only risen, it's jumped up!

Super Mario Odyssey totally reinvigorated Pauline in 2017, bringing her boldly into the mainline Super Mario series and giving her the game's most prominent NPC role as the mayor of New Donk City. A grand, joyous, overflowingly celebratory musical performance taking place all across the skyline of that city – with Pauline on the mic – served as the centerpiece and the most memorable moment of that entire adventure. And the song she sang – "Jump Up, Super Star!" – went viral beyond the game itself, bringing in millions of views across YouTube and social media and being prominently used in Odyssey's marketing.

With that huge new spotlight shining on her, Pauline got promoted even further across the extended Mario series. She did indeed get to join the cast of playable racers in the Mario Kart franchise, but her playability didn't stop there – she was also added to the casts of Mario Strikers: Battle League, Mario Golf: Super Rush and Mario Tennis Aces. She even made it into The Super Mario Bros. Movie, this time as the mayor of New York! Well done, Pauline! – **LUCAS**

RETURN:
OCTOBER 2017

THE LEGEND OF ALL THE DIFFERENT ZELDAS

Mario's always the same Mario. There's only ever been one Kirby. Most video game characters are singular in that sense — but not in the Zelda series! Over the decades we've been introduced to dozens of different versions of Link, Ganon and Zelda. Now, as yet another new take on the Princess is about to debut in Echoes of Wisdom, let's take a look back at all of her many predecessors!

BY LUCAS M. THOMAS

THE ORIGINAL

Once upon a time (in the mid-'80s), there was only a single Princess Zelda. The first of her name!

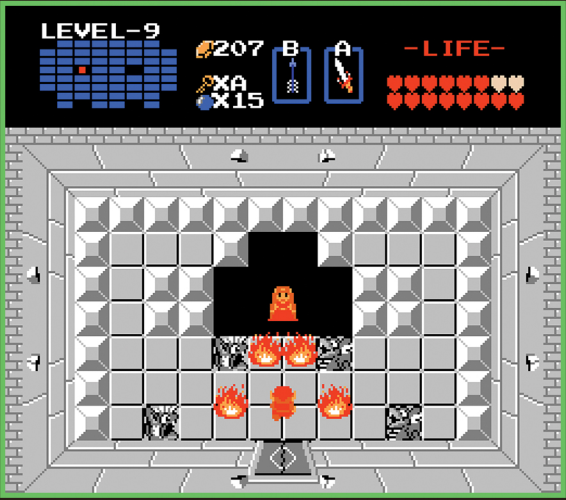
The original Princess Zelda appeared in the original **Legend of Zelda** game, of course, but only at the very end of it. There she sat and simply waited for some hero to arrive and save her, trapped in a depressingly lonely chamber in the middle of Ganon's Death Mountain fortress, surrounded by fire . . . and probably bored out of her mind with not much to do to pass the time. This first Zelda was the textbook definition of a damsel in distress: a character who exists only as motivation for a hero to set out on a quest, and did very little else beyond sit, wait and finally proclaim her boundless thanks to her savior when he arrived at long last.

. . . If that were all we ever saw or knew about this Zelda, it would be a disappointing start to this saga. But there's more to this story!

In the mid-'80s, game cartridges often couldn't contain too much story content, so it was up to the printed instruction manuals that shipped alongside them in their boxes to fill in critical details and provide each adventure's backstory. There, in the Zelda 1 manual, we got a fuller picture of this princess.

When Ganon and his armies of evil marched into Hyrule and stole the Triforce of Power, this Zelda quickly took action! She separated her kingdom's second treasure, the Triforce of Wisdom, into eight fragments and hid those pieces in underground labyrinths spread throughout the land – preventing Ganon from getting his hands on them. She then charged her nursemaid Impa to quietly escape and seek out a hero: someone with the courage to stand against and defeat Ganon for good. And it's a good thing she did! Because Ganon then swooped in and kidnapped Zelda, imprisoning her in that dark, lonely, fire-filled chamber.

So the first Zelda didn't do a lot on-screen in the first Zelda game – but her actions set up the entire quest to begin with!



THE SLEEPER

In The Legend of Zelda, players only got to see the princess at the very end. But in **Zelda II: The Adventure of Link**, she was on the screen from the first moment the new quest began!

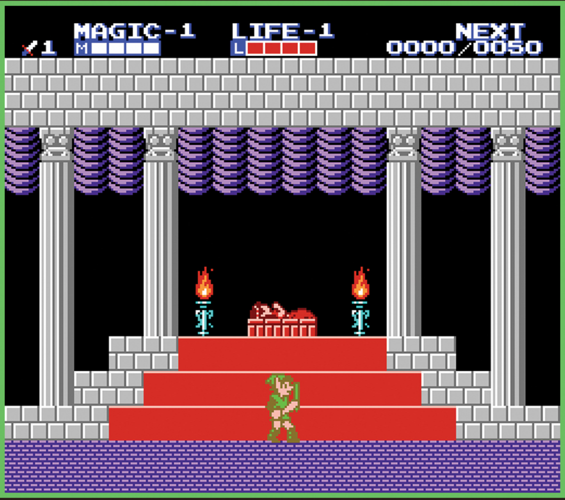
Only, this wasn't the same Zelda as before. This sleeping Zelda was the *actual* original Zelda (the real first of her name), and she'd been cursed into a perpetual, magical slumber that had endured for centuries.

Flash back to an older, more ancient Kingdom of Hyrule, when the king of the land was nearing the end of his reign. The heir to his throne, though, was unworthy: a greedy prince who coveted power and privilege. The king knew the land would come to ruin were his wicked son to rule, so he favored his younger daughter and told only her the truth: There was a third, secret Triforce, the Triforce of Courage, and it was hidden in the Great Palace, protected by a magical barrier.

This Princess Zelda guarded her father's secret resolutely, and when her evil brother demanded to know what knowledge she was keeping from him, she steadfastly refused. She gave her father her word! Enraged, the greedy prince enlisted a sinister magician to threaten his sister with a curse of eternal slumber – a threat he made good on! Zelda fell asleep and remained that way, comatose, never aging but also never waking up.

Unfortunately, the magician died from the exertion of casting the curse, leaving no way for him to undo what he'd done. The prince, wracked with guilt over what he'd allowed to happen to his sister, decreed that all future daughters born into the royal family of Hyrule must be named Zelda in her honor. (Which is impressively, presciently early timing in the history of this franchise – justifying the continued reuse of the same name within the lore of just the second game!)

Link's second quest ultimately has him locate the Triforce of Courage, and with its power, the sleeper finally awakens!



THE TV STAR

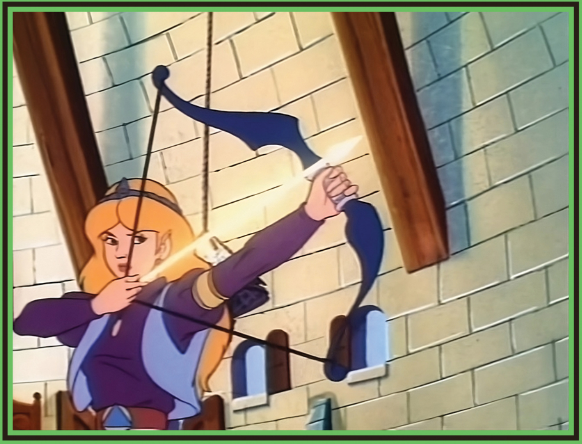
The story of the second Zelda, again, is only known to us thanks to its inclusion in Zelda II's instruction manual — in the game itself, she simply slept, unmoving, until the completion of the quest. Combined with the first game's nearly equally inactive princess, fans hadn't actually seen Zelda *do* much on the screen as the '80s came to an end.

But that all changed one Friday afternoon! On September 8, 1989 (35 years ago now!), Nintendo fans got to see the first episode of the **Legend of Zelda TV series**. It shared a time slot with the Super Mario Bros. Super Show — while kids getting home and turning on the tube after school got to see Mario's adventures from Monday through Thursday, Fridays were set aside for the adventures of Link and a third version of Zelda.

And boy did this Zelda make an impression! The polar opposite of the lady-in-waiting of Zelda 1 and the sleeping beauty of Zelda II, TV Zelda was a constantly active action hero, always ready to leap into battle right alongside Link (and saving his bacon countless times as they fought off the evil pig wizard Ganon).

Zelda was elevated to the level of Link's equal in this take on the young franchise, and she remained the most confident and capable version of the princess for years, following the show's short, single-season run. She reappeared in a few crossover episodes of **Captain N: The Game Master** in 1990, though, adapting story material from Zelda II. It wasn't the second full Zelda TV season we NES era fans hoped for, but it was the most epic collision of worlds in the cartoon that was already known for mixing together tons of game franchises.

In that same era, a **Legend of Zelda comic series** produced by Valiant Comics again featured this same version of Zelda, as did a couple of **Nintendo Adventure Books**. It's easy to understand why this depiction was turned to again and again: She was a warrior princess! A magic-wielding force to be reckoned with, and a crack shot with a bow too. In fact, her superb skill as an archer certainly influenced later versions of the character, who'd wield bows themselves during critical story scenes. (Well done, TV Zelda! You left a great legacy!)



THE PRISONER

"Help me . . . Please help me . . . I am a prisoner in the castle dungeon. My name is Zelda . . . The wizard, Agahnim, has done something terrible to the other girls . . . Now only I remain . . . Agahnim has seized control of the castle and even now is trying to open the sages' seal. I am in the dungeon of the castle. Please help me . . . "

The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past, the series' third installment, begins with these words calling out to Link as he sleeps. Another new take on the character of Zelda is demonstrating an ability previously unseen in her predecessors: telepathic communication!

These mental messages serve as the motivation for the Link of this era to get up out of bed and begin his adventure (along with the fact that his uncle set out in the middle of a storm and never came home). Link tracks down his father figure, finding him injured from his own attempt to save the princess. Our hero takes up his uncle's sword and shield and finishes what he started: He actually finds and saves Zelda within the game's opening act!

And so we were introduced to the first in-game Zelda to have an active presence in gameplay. Once freed from her jail cell, Zelda follows along behind Link, guiding him as the pair make their escape together through a sewer system beneath Hyrule Castle. She ultimately leads Link to the Sanctuary, a church that serves as a home base/fast travel point in the Light World for the rest of his quest. Zelda herself remains there safely!

. . . For a while. She eventually is stolen away by evil forces again, and imprisoned in a floating magical crystal instead of behind simple iron bars. It's up to Link to rescue her again, along with six other kidnapped maidens. When he does so, Zelda joins forces with them and together the seven women — echoing the seven sages of ages past — break the magical barrier around Ganon's Tower, the game's final dungeon.

PLAYABLE #1

Despite Rebecca's assurance on Page 4 that we do not speak of this era in Zelda series history, I'm afraid we must, for the sake a telling a complete story. Especially since this was when Zelda first became playable!

In the early '90s, Nintendo famously originally planned to partner with Sony to develop a CD-based add-on for the SNES – but Nintendo then backed out of that deal, prompting Sony to continue on their own and create the first PlayStation. (One of Nintendo's famous blunders.) After showing Sony the door, the Big N tried to partner with the Philips company and tap into their expertise with CD media instead – but then they backed out of *that* deal too. As an apology to Philips, Nintendo then allowed them to use some of their first-party characters to make games for their ill-fated machine, the Philips CD-i.

Three Legend of Zelda games were made as a result, with the first two being an infamous pair: **Link: The Faces of Evil** and **Zelda: The Wand of Gamelon**. A new version of Zelda was featured in both. In Link's game she was, of course, kidnapped by Ganon. But in The Wand of Gamelon, she was the playable protagonist!

With sword and shield in hand, Princess Zelda traveled to the land of Gamelon to search for her father and Link, both of whom had gone missing there. Gameplay was cloned from Link's Faces of Evil adventure: an inexperienced development team's attempt to remake the sidescrolling combat scenes of Zelda II, then embellish them further with lots of extra items and gimmicks. Zelda had nothing really unique about her in this quest, other than having a few items in her game that Link didn't use in his, including the titular Wand.

In terms of personality, it's clear that the writers for these games had seen every episode of the TV series, as they copied Link and Zelda's back-and-forth style of banter straight from it (including Link's constant whining for Zelda to kiss him). That was already annoying – but then the animated cutscenes on the CD-i were so poorly made that both Link and Zelda felt like absolute buffoons here. Sadly, this Zelda has since gone down in history as the laughing stock of all the many Zeldas.

PLAYABLE #2

Not content to create just one new Zelda to headline her own absymally received adventure on the CD-i, Philips commissioned the creation of another! And, again, we unfortunately must discuss her since she too was the playable hero in her game (as terrible as it was).

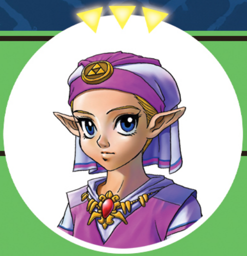
Zelda's Adventure was released eight months after Zelda: The Wand of Gamelon, but had nothing at all in common with it other than the underpowered hardware that both games were forced to run on. This game was made by a different development team who took a totally different approach to bringing the Zelda brand to Philips' ecosystem: Whereas The Wand of Gamelon was a sidescroller with cartoon graphics and Saturday morning-style cutscenes, Zelda's Adventure was a top-down game with completely realistic visuals, starring live-action actors for its cinematics.

That's Zelda herself pictured above – but unfortunately, that's the best shot of her in the game. She never appears in any other cutscenes with a better pose than that one: her actress staring down at the floor while a wizard places a magic pendant around her neck. ("Actress" is being generous; the budget for this game was so low that Zelda was apparently played by the office receptionist, Diane.)

Zelda's Adventure is admittedly rough, but its developers did at least attempt a more unique portrayal of the princess, gameplay-wise. She wields a wand, rather than copying Link's sword and shield fighting style again. She casts a variety of spells, making her more of a magic user than ever before – though, confusingly, many of her "spells" just cause weapons to appear. (She has a "Dagger" spell, a "Broadsword" spell, a "Hammer" spell and more.) A few, at least, are genuine magic – like the flame-summoning "Firestorm."

The game can also be lightly applauded for sticking to a more traditional Zelda series structure, sending our princess hero into seven different dungeons to gather MacGuffins and ultimately defeating Ganon to save a kidnapped Link. Zelda's Adventure is the least embarrassing of the three CD-i games – but Nintendo still denies the existence of all of them.

THE SPLIT IDENTITY



Three new Zeldas debuting in the same game? Now we're getting to the good stuff. Hold your breath and let's dive in!

The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, true to its subtitle, introduced an all-new narrative element to the Zelda series: time travel! And, as a result, we got a whole series of new Zelda designs split across two different time periods in one adventure.

The first, seen in the game's flash-forwarding opening cutscene, was Ocarina of Time's Young Zelda. The 10-year-old Princess of Hyrule, she's first shown in a moment of distress, fleeing for her life on horseback alongside this game's version of Impa, with a new and more sinister version of Ganondorf in hot pursuit. As the game begins, though, the story time-travels the player's point of view by rewinding to a moment a few days before that midnight horse ride. We meet the new Young Link, explore the Kokiri Forest and clear the game's first dungeon before traveling to Hyrule Castle.

There, Young Link's first real meeting with Young Zelda takes place. He sneaks through the castle garden, evading security and ultimately finds the young princess alone, gazing through a window at Ganondorf, who's inside and in the midst of pledging false fealty to Hyrule's king. Young Zelda serves as the voice setting up the story for the rest of the quest, explaining Ganondorf's evil and pointing Young Link in the direction he should go next. Finally, after finishing all of the dungeons in the "Young" side of the timeline, that scene depicting Young Zelda's frightened flight from the castle takes place – with an addition: She tosses the titular Ocarina of Time to our child hero, entrusting him to keep it out of Ganondorf's clutches!

The Ocarina of Time is the final piece of the puzzle, and with it players are able to open up the second half of the adventure: the "Adult" time period, taking place after a seven-year time skip into the future! In this later era, Zelda is now 17 years old . . . but she's in hiding. She doesn't greet Link right away as he adjusts to the shock of suddenly becoming 17 himself. Instead we meet a new ally character who helps move the story along: Sheik!

Sheik is a calm, confident and capable ninja-styled warrior who claims to be a member of the ancient Sheikah tribe of people, like this game's Impa is. Sheik serves much the same function that Young Zelda did, showing up in cutscenes to move the story along and point players toward each next objective. In addition, Sheik is a capable music teacher! Link learns several different fast travel songs during Sheik's cutscenes, helping him get around the world.

This hasn't been a real spoiler for a couple of decades at this point, but even still, here it is: Sheik is really Princess Zelda in disguise! It's been a known fact by the greater Nintendo fandom for a long time now, but playing the game blind for the first time in 1998, I'll say it wasn't immediately obvious. Suspicions only rose for me after seeing a few different Sheik cutscenes and realizing that Zelda herself hadn't yet shown her face in the future. She finally does, near the very end of the quest, using the magic of the Triforce of Wisdom to transform into Adult Zelda.

At that moment, of course, Ganondorf finally swoops in to nab her, setting up the traditional "save the princess" motivation for the final confrontation. Adult Zelda is no helpless damsel, though – she plays an active role in the last big boss battle, blasting the big, shapeshifted and snarling pig beast Ganon with her magic to give Link the chance to finish the fight with one swift stroke of the Master Sword.

Ocarina of Time set a new high bar for the Zelda franchise when it was released, and even now, over a quarter of a century later, it's still recognized as an industry-shifting masterpiece. Part of that enduring impact is due to its three-in-one take on Princess Zelda!

THE GUARDIAN

One of the lesser-known Zeldas made her debut in the GBA re-release of A Link to the Past, in the new side game that was included: **The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords.** This Princess Zelda is the guardian of a sacred shrine where the legendary Four Sword lies in rest, keeping an evil wizard named Vaati sealed away from the outside world. She senses the magical seal is weakening, though, and when she and Link visit the shrine to investigate, they discover Vaati has already managed to escape! He snatches Zelda up and flies away with her, saying that he intends to marry the princess. That was new for this series: Bowser's motivation has been to wed Princess Peach against her will in a few different stories, but that's rarely been the villain's plan in the Zelda series.

The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures, a separate game, was then released a few years later. Its Zelda is meant to be yet another different person, as FSA's story takes place much later in the series' timeline, but her visual design was kept exactly the same between the two games: identified by the big, sharp bow in her hair not seen on other Zeldas. The story of Four Swords Adventures gets a little muddy with other games in the series, though, since it once again involves Vaati breaking free from the Four Sword's seal and Zelda working together with six other maidens to restore magical balance near the end of the narrative.

THE STATUE

What's worse than getting kidnapped? Getting turned to stone first, and *then* getting kidnapped. The Princess Zelda of **The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap** had a really hard time. (Pun intended.)

Before becoming petrified, this Zelda was playful, energetic and just plain fun! She's introduced to players as Link's best childhood friend, giving the two characters an established relationship right from the start rather than having them meet each other for the first time during the course of the story. That was a refreshing change of pace, as was the whole intro sequence to the game: Link and Zelda attend a festival together, talking to townsfolk, playing games and even winning a prize before the real serious video game stuff gets started. Zelda wins a shield at the festival and gives it to her buddy Link as a gift, and that's just a heartwarming way to get equipped with a series staple!

The Minish Cap ends up being the first chronological Vaati sighting, as the recurring character's backstory is revealed and this Zelda becomes the first one to thwart his plans of conquest with her magic. After Link goes on his quest and unpetrifies her, of course — it's the least he could do for his best friend, especially after she gave him that snazzy shield!

THE PRINCESS & THE PIRATE

What happens when Princess Zelda doesn't even know that she *is* Princess Zelda?

In **The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker**, players are introduced early on to the most independent, unique and self-actualized young woman the series had ever seen to that point: Tetra. She's a pirate captain, leading a ship full of brutes and brigands who have the utmost respect for her, even though she's by far the youngest member of the crew. She inherited her ship after her mother, the previous captain, passed away – leaving Tetra to carry on the family tradition of plundering and pillaging across the Great Sea that, in this era, stretched across all of Hyrule.

Tetra has an intense interest in treasure hunting (of course, she's a pirate), as well as ancient legends. Little does she know, she's a central figure in Hyrule's grandest story! The truth doesn't come out right away, though.

First, Tetra has to help the Link of this era to save his little sister, Aryll, who was kidnapped by a gigantic bird (it was trying to snag Tetra herself, but got confused because Aryll looked similar). She also helps Link learn a bit of swashbuckling, gives him a Pirate's Charm that lets her keep in touch telepathically, leads her crew to steal a whole arsenal of explosives from a bomb shop and rushes in to attack Ganondorf head-on, with no hesitation, when Link is in trouble halfway through the quest. Tetra is a total spitfire, and after finally discovering her true identity during a classic cutscene, she keeps on kicking butt in her Princess Zelda guise!

The final battle of The Wind Waker is iconic, and Tetra (as Zelda) contributes to the fight (like Ocarina of Time's Zelda) by attacking Ganondorf with a bow and light arrows (like TV Zelda). As the quest ends, though, she leaves the princess identity behind, once again preferring to look and live like a pirate.

She then earned an honor few other Zeldas have had: starring in a second game! **The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass** picked up where Wind Waker left off, with Link and Zelda sailing beyond the edge of the Great Sea to discover new lands. She's much less active in that adventure, since she gets kidnapped, but hey, every Zelda has to put in their time as a "Help me, Link!" victim, right?

Tetra also starred in Navi Trackers, a mode in Japan and Korea's versions of Four Swords Adventures. It was originally meant to be a standalone game, **Tetra's Trackers**, but that plan sadly got canned.

THE PHANTOM

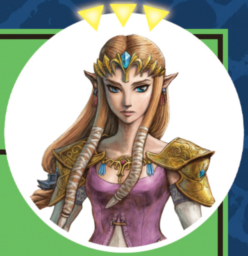
The Toon style first seen in Wind Waker and carried on into Phantom Hourglass continued into a third title, in which Zelda became a phantom herself!

In **The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks**, the new Princess Zelda is a descendant of Tetra and looks a lot like her ancestor – and she nearly goes to meet her in the afterlife in the opening scenes of the game, when she's suddenly killed! Rather than move on to the great beyond, though, this Zelda sticks around Hyrule as a ghost. She then tags along with Link for his entire adventure, taking on a job no other Zelda ever had before: being the game's constant companion/sidekick!

Being a floating spirit ends up working out well for the tag team of two heroes, as Zelda is able to use ghostly powers to possess the Phantoms (big, hulking suits of armor) that stalk the halls of the Tower of Spirits. As a Phantom, Zelda can solve puzzles, give Link a lift across pools of lava and more – she's an invaluable teammate, and the quest would be impossible to complete without her!

And in the end, she gets her body back. If you were worried.

THE PUPPET



So we've had Ghost Zelda. Ninja Zelda. Pirate Zelda and Rip Van Winkle Zelda and Office Receptionist Diane Zelda. But how about *Evil* Zelda?

In a curveball the series was bound to throw at some point, **The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess** gave us a Princess Zelda who gets possessed by Ganondorf's magical malevolence and turns into an actual villain who must be battled as a boss.

Puppet Zelda is more off-putting than intimidating – it's not too difficult to defeat her, but it does feel bad slashing at Zelda with the Master Sword after decades of trying to rescue her again and again. She attacks with a classic volley-the-ball minigame, in which she hurls an energy sphere at Link and the player must bat it back and forth with her several times before it finally hits her and takes her down. Three hits like that and it's curtains for Zelda's evil alter ego.

That battle, thankfully, is just one chapter in the story of the titular Twilight Princess. This Zelda, in the hours leading up to that final confrontation, proves herself to be a truly self-sacrificial monarch, putting her people's welfare well above her own. She also gives part of her own life force away to heal Midna, Link's co-pilot for this quest, at a point when she's been critically injured.

Finally, after the Puppet Zelda battle, she recovers her sense of self and assists Link once again in his quest-ending final fight with Ganondorf. Wielding a bow again, of course!

THE PAINTING

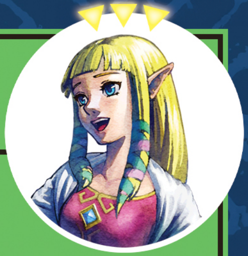
Centuries after A Link to the Past, a new tale unfolds in the same version of Hyrule — but instead of a Dark World, a new parallel plane called Lorule is explored by the players!

This is **The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds**, and its Princess Zelda is a fairly traditional one — though she gets kidnapped in an untraditional manner: She gets transformed into a painting! (The villain this time around, Yuga, is an evil artist who likes to hang his victims on his wall.) Link has to tap into some 2D transformation powers of his own to save the day, slipping between worlds as a living piece of graffiti!

More memorable than this sequel's Zelda, though, was her counterpart in the Kingdom of Lorule: Princess Hilda! While Zelda has enjoyed reigning over a kingdom of peace and light in Hyrule above, Hilda has struggled to scratch out a living for her subjects in Lorule below. This drives her to seek out help from Hyrule, and she implores Link to save the Seven Sages from the dungeons in Lorule where they've been trapped.

Hilda serves to move the story along, offering tips to the player and guidance through the game . . . until the final act, when it's revealed that her help was all a setup! She betrays Link and attacks him, hoping to steal the Triforce of Courage from him and restore the grandeur of Lorule! It doesn't work, of course. Link wins. But she apologizes, so it's all good.

THE STUDENT



How about a Princess Zelda who isn't actually a princess?

The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword introduced arguably the most adorable and relatable take on this classic character ever — because she wasn't some high-and-mighty monarch. Instead, she was simply a student!

This Zelda was enrolled at the Knight Academy, a school built on the floating island of Skyloft, high up in the skies above the land that would one day become the Kingdom of Hyrule. (But it wasn't there yet, since this tale took place further back into the past than any other Zelda adventure!)

With Hyrule not yet established as a kingdom, this Zelda's Dad couldn't be a king. So he was the school's headmaster instead! I'm not sure what it would be like to have one of your parents be the principal of your high school, but I'd have to imagine it would come with some perks, privileges and special treatment.

And Zelda does indeed seem set apart from the other students at the Knight Academy: She gets specially selected to play the role of the Goddess Hylia in the Ceremony of the Goddess, marking the 25th anniversary of the opening of the school. (Skyward Sword was the franchise's 25th anniversary game, if you never made that connection before.) She's also kind of a prize to be won, as the student who wins the Wing Ceremony race of Loftwings gets to join her and also be a part of her important moment of making an offering to Hylia!

From those humble origins, this Zelda of course gets swept up into a grand adventure and ultimately becomes the actual reincarnation of Hylia herself. But, through it all, she never loses her kind and loving spirit. She's the series sweetheart!

THE WARRIOR

We're nearing the end of our list and are almost at the point of looking ahead to the first properly playable, in-canon incarnation of Zelda in the upcoming Echoes of Wisdom. But before we get there, we do have to pay appropriate homage to this Zelda, the warrior princess who led the charge against hundreds and thousands of evil enemies on the battlefields of the Warriors games.

2014's **Hyrule Warriors** from the Wii U, its 3DS re-release **Hyrule Warriors Legends** and the **Definitive Edition** on the Switch are all considered to be out of canon, as their story was a crossover tale that mixed together several of the previous Zelda games we've talked about. But in the midst of the chaos was this new Zelda, made just for the Warriors series, who put on a clinic of enemy-eliminating excellence every time she charged into battle.

By default, Warrior Zelda wielded a rapier, carving her way through dozens of foes at a time. But Warriors games like to re-equip their heroes with lots of other weapons, so this same Zelda also demonstrated proficiency with items like the Baton and the Dominion Rod. In addition, Warrior Zelda could become a Warriors-exclusive version of Sheik! In that form, a simple Harp musically mashed all of Ganon's monsters.

Finally, the Warriors titles made playable other Zeldas like Tetra, Toon Zelda from Spirit Tracks and, in **Age of Calamity**, the next princess we're about to profile. (All still non-canon, though. Some fans are diehard serious about noting that!)

THE SCHOLAR

Debuting alongside the launch of the Nintendo Switch in 2017, Princess Zelda from **Breath of the Wild** established her own identity among this crowded collection of counterparts by largely rejecting the magic she was born to wield and the loftiness of her royal station. This Zelda instead adored research!

A scholar and a scientist, this Zelda loved breaking free of the constraints of castle life, getting out into the field and making discoveries about the plants and animals of Hyrule. She was an accomplished historian as well, always diving deeper into learning about Hyrule's history and the enigmatic artifacts left behind by ancient civilizations, like the imposing Guardians and the massive Divine Beasts.

But when Hyrule is threatened by Calamity Ganon, Zelda is forced to cast aside her reluctance and seriously pursue a mastery of her magical potential. Through frustration and the loss of several loved ones, she finally manages to awaken her abilities and seal Ganon away — but only for 100 years, while Link recovers from grievous injury. Once he opens his eyes and embarks on his quest, the two ultimately come together to vanquish Dark Beast Ganon on Hyrule's open plains!

This same Zelda also appears in **Tears of the Kingdom**, and there her story is even more emotional and self-sacrificial. But since that game just came out last year, I don't think I'll provide a full summary of Zelda's journey through it in these pages quite yet. Please seek out and play it for yourself!

ALL THE REST

That was a fairly lengthy list, and yet there are still more Zeldas spread across the Legend of Zelda multiverse! The rest of them have all had fairly minor roles, though, or have appeared in other out-of-canon stories.

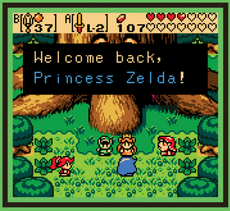
The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening, even though it was just the fourth game in the main series, had no appearance from the princess. She was briefly mentioned, though. Then in the series' sixth game, **Majora's Mask**, Zelda shows up only in a single black-and-white cutscene to re-teach players how to play the Song of Time. We covered both of them earlier, in the entries for A Link to the Past and Ocarina of Time.

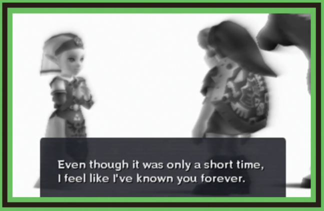
A different Princess Zelda appeared in **Oracle of Seasons** and **Oracle of Ages**, but only if you played both games back-to-back and only briefly at the end. Twinrova captures her after both games are cleared to set up a final double-game end boss battle – but Link swiftly rescues her, of course.

Another Zelda was in 1989's **Zelda Game & Watch**. She got kidnapped by evil dragons, but was also rescued by Link.

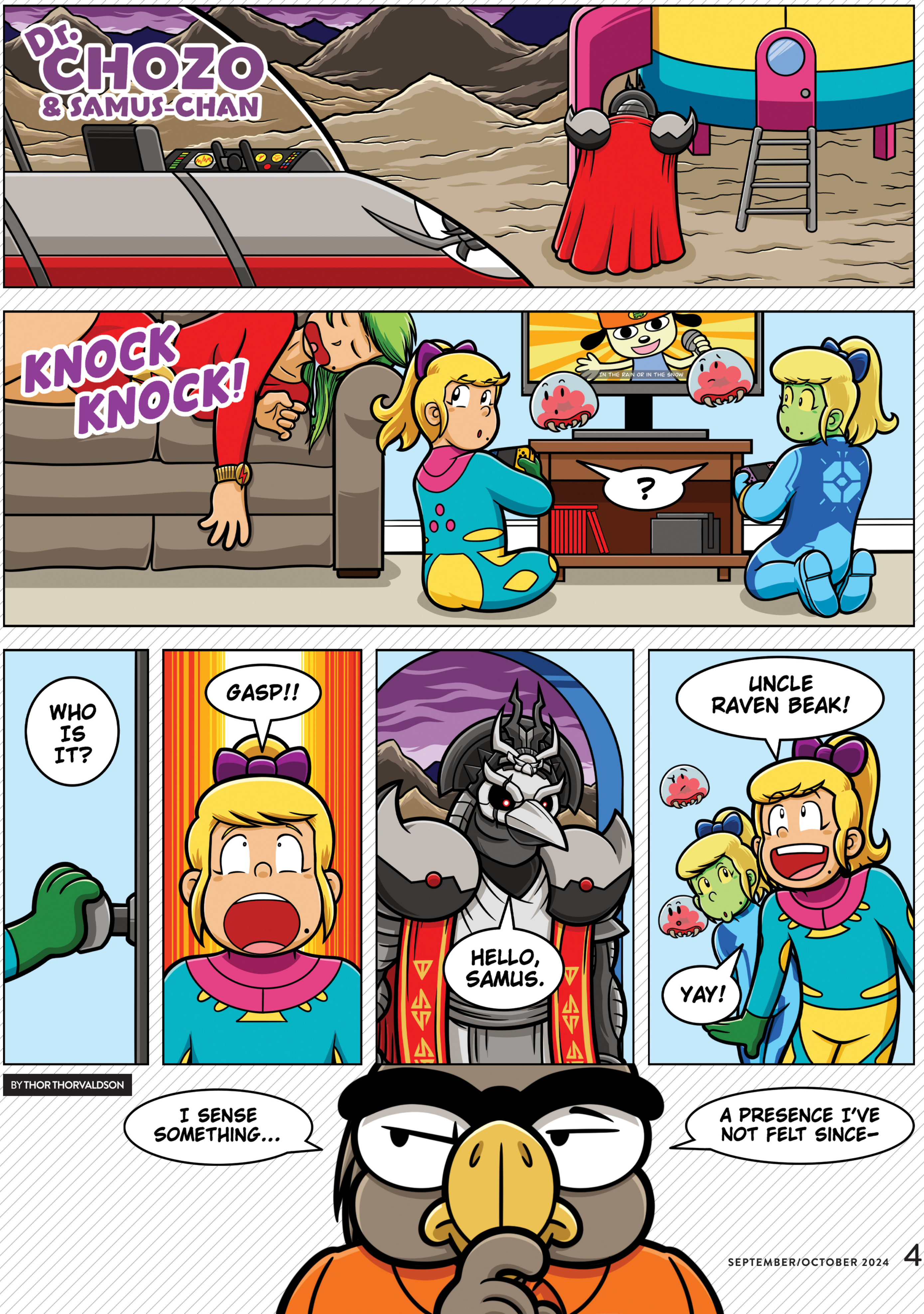
A prominently playable new Zelda appeared back in 2019 in the indie-developed **Cadence of Hyrule**! She moved to the beat of the background music, in keeping with the standard set by the gameplay in Crypt of the Necrodancer, which was made by the same development team.

Finally, we have to mention the different Zeldas who have taken part in the Super Smash Bros. series over the decades! Zelda's look has changed several times there: She originally resembled her Ocarina of Time incarnation, then Twilight Princess took over, and most recently her appearance was most inspired by the Zeldas of A Link to the Past and A Link Between Worlds. Her moves reference even more Zeldas beyond those, too. She's a celebration of their whole history!





Princess Zelda is a name and title that has been shared by dozens of different women over the decades — each one with her own strengths. (Even the CD-i stars.) Now, we race forward into a new chapter in Zelda's long-running legend — an era in which Nintendo is finally no longer afraid to sideline Link and let the series' namesake step up and command the spotlight entirely on her own! It's an exciting time to be a fan of this legendary leading lady, or to become one for the first time!



BY THOR THORVALDSON

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: ECHOES OF WISDOM

It's a Zelda game! No, I mean a *Zelda* game. A Zelda game actually starring Zelda!

AFTER FOUR DECADES of damsel-in-distressing, being kicked down to sidekick status, sometimes getting entirely ignored and having all of her previous playable appearances be considered noncanonical, at long last, the titular Zelda of the Legend of Zelda franchise is finally getting a real, recognized, official adventure that is all her own.

Link just has to fall in a hole first.

PASSING THE TORCH

Adopting the same toy-like art style first seen five years ago in the Switch remake of Link's Awakening, The Legend of Zelda: Echoes of Wisdom once again opens the same way all the older Zelda games always have: with players stepping into the shoes of Link himself, Hyrule's traditional hero. But he doesn't stay playable for long! Following an opening-scene victory over the villainous Ganon, magical rifts in space and time begin to appear and swallow up portions of the land of Hyrule. Link falls victim to the first of these quicksand-like portals, but before he fully sinks into its menacing embrace, he lets loose an arrow that finds its mark: the hovering crystal that Princess Zelda is trapped inside.

She breaks free from her imprisonment just as Link fades from view, disappearing into some other dimension. But the game's focus, rather than following Link to wherever he went, stays fixed on the now-playable princess!

Zelda's goals are set: Avoid falling into these same rifts that just engulfed Hyrule's old hero, figure out where they're coming from, how to stop them from spreading and how to eliminate the ones that have already appeared, and finally, of course, find and rescue Link.

AT LONG LAST, IT'S HER MOMENT

Before going further into previewing Echoes of Wisdom itself, I want to ink into permanence my appreciation for Nintendo finally taking this long-requested step for the Zelda franchise. "Playable Zelda" has been a carrot dangling out in front of Zelda fans' noses for decades. Seriously, there were playground rumors swirling about her becoming a controllable hero as far back as the early '90s, when A Link to the Past was still in development and still only known as "Zelda III." But throughout 30 years' worth of sequels and spin-offs, the only developers ever bold enough to actually grant that wish were the ones working outside Nintendo's walls.

Things really reached a fever pitch in the years leading up to the launch of Tears of the Kingdom, as I'm sure many of you will recall, since the early look we got at its opening cutscene that showed Link and Zelda getting separated (as she fell into a hole, of course) caused speculation to ignite that both characters might end up being controllable: With Link exploring the islands of the sky and Zelda being the one to investigate the depths deep underground. But, again, that didn't happen. It was another solo Link show.

SWITCH **PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO **RELEASE:** SEPTEMBER 26, 2024 **RATING:** E

Finally, though, Nintendo's in-house dev teams got the message. Players of Zelda want to play as Zelda! And so we're getting that chance at long last.

A WIZARD OF WISDOM

Now, doing a direct swap-out of Zelda for Link would've been more than enough to satisfy long-suffering fans. Give her the same old swords and shields and bows and bombs – we would've clapped and cheered all the same. But Nintendo's not phoning in Zelda's first official step into the spotlight. They're giving her all of her own items and abilities!

Shortly after making her way back to Hyrule Castle following Zelda's breaking free from her crystal prison and Link's disappearance into the rifts, Zelda finds herself imprisoned again – this time in the castle's dungeon. The story hasn't been fully revealed to give us complete context for why she ends up there, but extra footage from the game's Japanese website shows that Zelda's father, the King of Hyrule, also gets swallowed up by the ever-growing evil rifts. Could it be that Zelda gets blamed for the double loss of both Hyrule's hero and its king? And so the remaining, un-rift-engulfed soldiers decide to seize her and toss her in the brig?

However she ends up there, we know there's no Link rescue for her to count on this time, so it's up to Zelda to make her own escape. Luckily, she does get some assistance from another ally: a mysterious floating entity named Tri!

Tri helps Zelda begin to awaken her unique magical abilites for this quest by granting her the use of a mystical artifact called the Tri Rod. A twisted kind of staff of summoning, the Tri Rod allows our protagonist princess to target objects, absorb their essences and then create copies of them!

Objects that are cloned in this way are the game's titular Echoes. And just about anything and everything can become an Echo, it seems!

Zelda can make copies of beds. Boxes. Plants and rocks and breakable pots.

She can clone and summon the elements themselves, echoing torches when she needs a source of fire or square blocks of water that she can then jump into to swim around. There are trampolines to bounce on for extra jump height. Hunks of meat to use as Bait that draw the attention of hungry enemies! (That one's a direct callback to Zelda 1!)

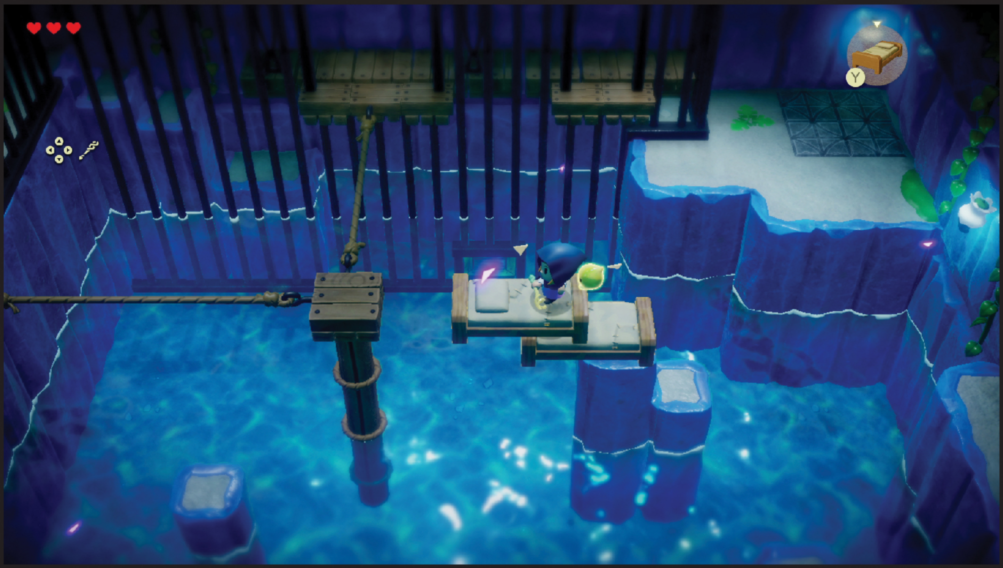
Basically, Echoes of Wisdom offers a full party platter of different *things* – environmental objects ranging from the common to the complex – and lets Zelda go crazy using each of them in whatever way she sees fit in order to solve puzzles and make progress.

ZELDA'S MANY MINIONS

Once Zelda uses the Tri Rod to "learn" the essence of an object for the first time, it becomes a permanent part of her summonable arsenal – adding to what ultimately becomes an incredibly lengthy list of possibilities to choose from when presented with any kind of problem to solve. The objects each have different ratings, too, or values representing how useful they are and how much summoning power it takes to call upon them. A simple rock, for instance, takes only one "unit" of Tri's power to bring into existence, visibly represented by one hovering golden triangle placed above it in the menu screen. Most standard pieces of the environment, when summoned, seem to take just one bit of power to create. So . . . what if you invest a bit more magical might? Well, then you could do more complicated summons. Like making your own monster minions!

Yes, Zelda's conjurations aren't limited to inanimate objects. She can also use the Tri Rod to copy the foes she comes across, then make clones of those creatures that will be loyal to her and fight on her behalf. Octoroks. Tektites. Peahats. Leevers! Any classic creature you encounter can join your party as a computer-controlled ally.

. . . Temporarily. Tri doesn't quite have the strength to maintain the magic of summoning monsters forever – so some beasts (especially stronger ones) will only exist for a few seconds before blinking and then fading out of reality. But that's fine! You'll use them when you need them, and then call upon them again later on when you need them again. Summon a Moblin to take a few sword swipes at foes in front of you. Conjure a Blade Trap to spin its way forward, slicing enemies in your path. Summon a common Keese, just to watch it flap around!



FEELING FREE IN 2D

That kind of "do whatever you want" spirit is held over directly from Breath of the Wild and Tears of the Kingdom. In those games, Nintendo simply set up baseline gameplay mechanics and systems dictating how things like physics functioned, filled an open world with objects and enemies that Link could use to interact with those laws of nature, then simply turned players loose. Hyrule became a massive 3D sandbox, and no two players approached its obstacles and puzzles in the exact same way.

It's wild (or Wild?) to see that same sense of freedom instilled into a top-down 2D title in this same series! But it's an undeniable connection that only grows stronger with the more of Echoes of Wisdom you see. Everything is more open, more free.

Take Zelda's jumping for a simple example. Back in Link's Awakening, players couldn't jump at first – they had to find the Roc's Feather item and equip it to be granted that ability. But here? Jumping is just standard. Zelda can hop to her heart's content, build beds to bounce on, leap down off the sides of cliffs . . . and even onto the tops of trees! In Link's Awakening the trees looked a lot like they do here, but they were rarely interactable in any way. They were mostly just walls – barriers keeping spaces like the Mysterious Woods separated from surrounding areas. But now? Zelda can clamber up on top of any tree she sees – jumping from treetop to treetop, or just crossing right over one to get to what's behind it. Nintendo's developers have taken movements that would have been considered glitches in Link's Awakening and made them standard for every player. Again, that's Wild.

AN EXPANDED KINGDOM

Link's Awakening was the follow-up to A Link to the Past, and featured the same Link as its lead, so it makes sense that when that Link came home after his time away in Awakening, he returned to a kingdom that looks a lot like the one first seen in that SNES masterpiece. Echoes of Wisdom's map, understandably, is based on the one we first explored in 1992: Hyrule Castle is right in the middle, Kakariko Village is placed to the west, there's a desert in the lower left and so on.

But that old map has been greatly expanded upon! The explorable size of Hyrule has been increased beyond the old outer boundaries of the kingdom, in several critical places.

For example, you know how going straight south from Link's House took you to the Great Swamp, including the Swamp Ruins where you could raise and lower the water level? That was pretty much the southernmost point in A Link to the Past. But now, in Echoes of Wisdom, there's a new corridor leading further south from that same area, opening up a whole new coastal zone and a brand-new settlement called Suthorn Village.

The different races of Hyrule that were first introduced in games beyond A Link to the Past have retroactively been added to this world as well. You'll come across Gorons, Gerudos, Deku Scrubs and two different varieties of Zora – the Sea Zora and the River Zora – who seem to be constantly squabbling with one another. They'll populate expanded areas like the Eldin Volcano, Gerudo Desert and Faron Wetlands (which, again, are areas/names seen in later Zeldas and being used again here), as well as Jabul Waters, a new name that may be attached to an expanded version of the area in ALTTP where Link found the Zora's Flippers.

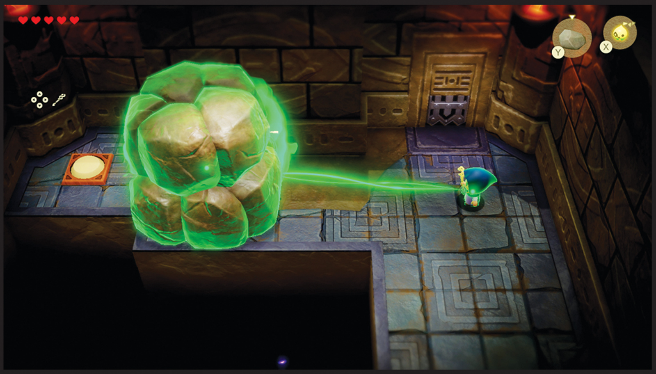
Or maybe Jabul Waters will be in a totally different place in Hyrule. Who knows? I'm excited to find out!

ITEMS IN THE INVENTORY

Speaking of the Zora's Flippers, they're back again in this adventure, but with modified functionality. In ALTTP, earning that item granted Link the ability to swim. Here in Echoes, Zelda can swim by default! So the Flippers just grant her a speed boost.

They're one of many optional accessories that will be available for our princess to purchase, find in secret treasure chests or create herself by mixing other items together. That last options applies to Smoothies, at least – like a streamlined version of Breath of the Wild's cooking system, Zelda will be able to take ingredients to shops scattered around the world map and have the proprietors there shake up a stat-boosting blend. Smoothies can restore lost hearts, grant Zelda buffs like cold or heat resistance, increase her movement speed (probably?), and much more.

Again, we're seeing lots of the 3D, open-world Zelda ideas being brought backwards in time in a sense to pop up here in this top-down style of the series for the first time. You'll also be able to find and wear different outfits, as in Breath of the Wild! You'll also be able to befriend and ride a horse, as in Breath of the Wild! *Similarities*, people!



BINDING AND BONDING

And we're not done yet! The comparisons continue, as Echoes also echoes an ability from Tears of the Kingdom: Ultrahand!

Tri's tried-and-true trick is to make copies of things, but sometimes that power won't provide a suitable solution to a situation. So Zelda's also granted the option to Bind things as well.

In practice and in looks, this is an awful lot like Link's Ultrahand power: You target something in the environment, a tether of glowing energy connects that target with our hero, and then our hero is able to move that thing around. No matter how big it is! Nintendo's explanation (and almost certainly also the in-game tutorial moment introducing the technique) sees Zelda impeded by a gigantic hunk of rock, but she Binds that boulder, walks with it a bit and drops it in a pit!

Bind can be used to remove obstacles, uproot treasure chests that are stuck in the ground and even grab hold of enemies to telekinetically pick them up and, say, shove them off the side of a mountain! (Ultrahand never did that.) Zelda won't have Ultrahand's ability to attach one object to another to create crazy contraptions (I don't think), but just the base functionality of grabbing hold of things and moving them around will be extremely helpful.

. . . And if you need the opposite to happen? *UNO Reverse!* Zelda's Bind power can also have its effect inverted — such that instead of Zelda moving an object or a creature around, the object or creature moves Zelda around! Used in that way, the power is called "Reverse Bond." The example offered there was Zelda encountering a gap too large to leap, and Reverse Bonding herself to a moving platform above to ride its motion to the other side.

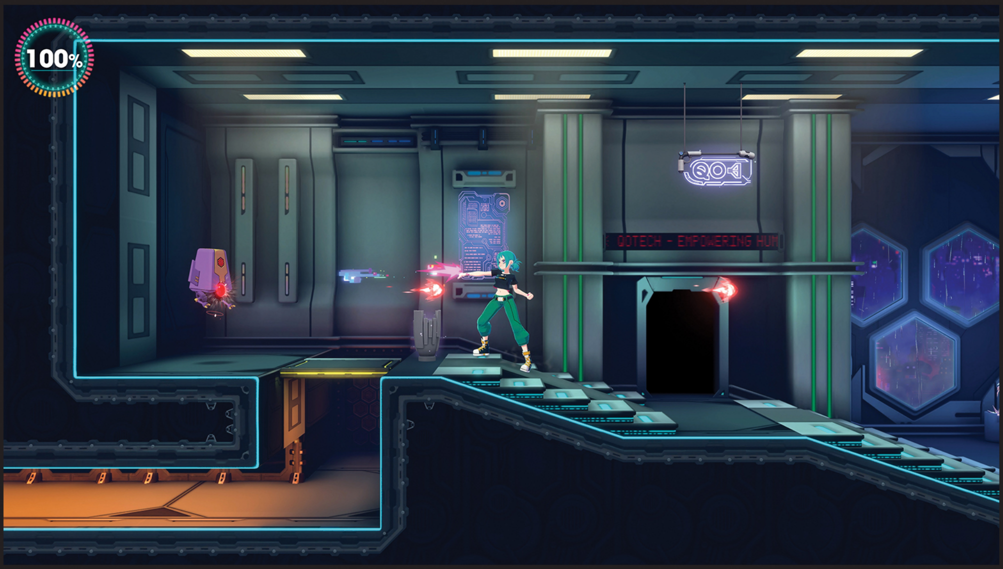
You could also Reverse Bond the princess to a bird to have its flight into the sky drag her along behind it, or Bond her to a spider to take advantage of its more capable climbing strength. Pushing and pulling, tethering and untethering, summoning saved objects and enemies out of the aether at will and throwing back a refreshing Smoothie after a hard day's work? Zelda's style of play in Echoes of Wisdom is a great big blend of old and new ideas, and it should make Echoes of Wisdom feel entirely fresh and fun.

HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

While first revealing this game's existence a few months ago, Zelda series director Eiji Aonuma remarked that there were so many different Echoes to find and create that he personally couldn't keep track of them all. And that potentially imposing quantity of options has only been added to since we've learned of the item inventory and array of optional outfits to also collect in this quest. So . . . will it all be too much?

That's my concern for Echoes in advance of its release, as one of the game flow problems that Breath of the Wild and Tears of the Kingdom ran into were menus that grew to be too massive to reasonably manage. You'd go to Fuse an item to an arrow in the middle of an epic battle against a soaring, roaring Gleeok . . . and you'd spend a solid 30 seconds scrolling back and forth in your overflowing inventory trying to find just the right gemstone or monster eyeball or whatever to attach before returning to the actual action. Will Echoes of Wisdom be the same? Will we spend more time moving around through menus here than we do playing the real game? The drawback of offering players so many options is that you then have to find some efficient way to organize those options, and I worry that Nintendo's team might not have done that in just the one year it's been since Tears of the Kingdom shipped and struggled in that same area.

Beyond that one worry, though, I'm entirely delighted by what we've seen from this latest installment in video gaming's most epic ongoing saga. I can't wait to get into it and re-explore this expanded Hyrule from A Link to the Past (and A Link Between Worlds, I should add!). I'm fascinated by the rifts, and always love games that let you work to reclaim and restore bits of the environment (like cleaning up the goop puddles in Super Mario Sunshine or restoring color to erased spaces in Paper Mario: Color Splash!). But, most of all, I'm so thrilled that we'll finally get to really become Princess Zelda. It's been such a long wait for this moment of main series playability to arrive for her. It's her time! **— LUCAS**



YARS RISING

WayForward's wild reimagining of a 42-year-old brand.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ATARI DEVELOPER: WAYFORWARD
RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 10, 2024 RATING: E10+

IT'S TIME FOR a pre-Nintendo history lesson!

Or pre-Nintendo Entertainment System, at least.

In the earliest years of the '80s, before Nintendo swooped in to save the floundering home console market (and the video game industry as a whole, by extension), the reigning kings of living room gaming were the developers at Atari. And one of the biggest hits of that era – and a title still remembered as a masterpiece to this day – was called Yars' Revenge. It was a sensation on the Atari 2600, selling over 1,000,000 copies!

Yars' Revenge was the brainchild of game industry legend Howard Scott Warshaw, and it first went on sale in May 1982. It was a creation both unique and not – Warshaw had first been tasked to port the arcade game Star Castle to the 2600, so several of the core ideas driving the gameplay were echoed from that earlier release. He changed and rearranged so much in transitioning the title that he ended up turning the result into a new game instead, with a new look, new lore and even an official comic book made to explain the whole backstory to players who picked up a cartridge.

That story, quickly, is that a race of highly evolved houseflies known as the Yars are at war with their nemeses, the planet-destroying Qotiles. In the gameplay, players take command of a flying Yar warrior and fight back against a Qotile that is hiding behind an energy shield. Using laser blasts to attack from afar – as well as nibbling away with your insectoid mandibles when up close – you open up a gap in the shield and expose the vulnerable Qotile inside. Finally, to finish the fight, you unleash the mighty Zorlon Cannon – if it hits the Qotile, boom! A massive explosion for massive victory.

OK, so what does all of that have to do with the new game this preview's supposed to be about? Well, Yars as a brand has not been too active over the last 42 years – there have been a few ports and remakes and the like – so Yars Rising is a bold new reimagining of the IP that's aiming to reintroduce the Yars world to a new generation of players. (Probably two new generations at this point, to be honest.)

For this total IP overhaul, the developers at WayForward have done what they do best and introduced a new female protagonist to lead the charge. Emi Kimura is a teenaged hacker, who also happens to go by "Yar" as a nickname. She's working to uncover the mysteries of the sinister company QoTech, skulking around the corporate headquarters and hacking into their most sensitive computer systems.

The gameplay in Yars Rising is 2D sidescrolling stealth and platforming within a Metroidvania-style go-where-you-want map. Emi can attack her enemies as needed, but it often makes more sense for her to try to slip by them unnoticed, fading back into the shadows.

Whenever she hacks a computer, that's when the game goes full throwback – the gameplay transforms into old-school Atari-esque Yars' Revenge challenges. If you succeed at blasting the Qotile the way the gamers of '82 did it four decades ago, your hack will succeed and you'll get to move on. If you fail, you'll have to try again!

It's a pretty tall task to try to bring a brand this old back into relevance in this day and age, but if anyone can do it, it's the IP-resurrecting experts at WayForward. **– LUCAS**

HELLO KITTY ISLAND ADVENTURE

Kitty will celebrate her 50th birthday with a new game!

FIFTY YEARS AGO, in 1974, a cute little cartoon cat first leapt out of the mind of character designer Yuko Shimizu and landed on a piece of paper. The following year, that same kawaii cat girl started to appear in lots of other places too – she was plastered across dozens, then hundreds and, now, decades later, an uncountable number of different pieces of merchandise, from handbags to hoodies to literally any other kind of consumer good you can think of. Hello Kitty, over a span of half a century, has become one of the world's most beloved (and most marketed) characters of all time.

Video games have, of course, been a part of her immense empire – and that line of her legacy will extend again early next year, when Hello Kitty Island Adventure for the Switch ships to store shelves.

This game first appeared as an Apple Arcade exclusive last year, but it's thankfully now going to be made available to the same players who enjoyed its biggest inspiration: Animal Crossing: New Horizons. Island Adventure could be elevator-pitched as "Animal Crossing meets Hello Kitty" – if that's all you need to know to buy in, then place your preorder now. But sweetening the pot for those who aren't instantly sold are the ways this game goes beyond what New Horizons offered – it has platforming challenges, Zelda-inspired climbing mechanics, underwater exploration and more facets of gameplay beyond the bits that seem cloned from the Crossing experience, like decorating your own home. You can also create your own animal character, instead of having to be human! Be a duck or a bunny or a dog. You do you!

Happy Birthday, Hello Kitty! Thanks in advance for the gift of this new game! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SANRIO DEVELOPER: SUNBLINK
RELEASE: EARLY 2025 RATING: E

PHANTOM BRAVE: THE LOST HERO

She speaks to the spirits of the sea.

ANOTHER ANNIVERSARY TO acknowledge is Phantom Brave's, as it's been 20 years since that cult classic first went on sale on the PS2 in America. (August 31, 2004 was the precise release date.) In the two decades since that debut, Phantom Brave has been ported, remade and re-released on four further platforms – the most recent one being the Switch, just three years ago – but the game never has seen a true sequel.

Until now! Phantom Brave: The Lost Hero is an all-new adventure finally picking up the first game's story and carrying it forward into a fresh new chapter.

If you never played Phantom Brave, it stars a 13-year-old girl named Marona who has the unique ability to see and communicate with spirits. She can additionally bring them temporarily back into the physical plane, binding their essences into tangible objects so that they can once again interact with the world of the living.

That power fuels the gameplay, which is turn-based and tactical. Marona serves as a central commander on the battlefield, and she targets any objects that happen to be scattered around the area in order to "Confine" spirits to them and transform them into soldiers. Those possessed-object fighters can tap into abilities based on what object they've possessed, too: For example, sending a spirit to inhabit an electric fan creates an ally who can blow enemies away with gusts of wind.

When she really needs to amp up the action, Marona can also send spirits into her own body, transforming herself into a fierce fusion fighter!

Phantom Brave: The Lost Hero, like Hello Kitty, will hit the Switch at some point in 2025. **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NIS AMERICA DEVELOPER: NIPPON ICHI
RELEASE: TBA 2025 RATING: RP

SUPER MARIO PARTY JAMBOREE

Mario's throwing one last shindig on the Switch!

THE NINTENDO SWITCH will host one more of Mario's soirées before all of Nintendo's attention switches to Switch 2.

Super Mario Party Jamboree will be the third (and certainly final) installment in this venerable party gaming series to see release on the Switch 1 system, following the original Super Mario Party from 2018 and 2021's Mario Party Superstars. The choice of title is an interesting one here, as they're intentionally returning to the *Super* Mario Party branding after having dropped that first word last time. Maybe they just didn't want to be redundant and name the last game Super Mario Party Superstars?

Regardless of the name, it looks like Jamboree will serve as a proper follow-up to both of its Switch era predecessors, as it's bringing back a few elements of both — while also clearly outclassing them in at least one area: board quantity!

SEVEN SEPARATE SELECTIONS

I personally adored both Super Mario Party and Mario Party Superstars, and both have gotten tons of playtime in the Thomas household over the years. But my common complaint for both of them, that I've brought up several times in past NF issues, was that they both lacked board variety. Mario Party Superstars had only five boards to choose from — and Super Mario Party was even worse, as it had only four! That lack of options meant we've had to play the same boards over and over and over again (and I've gotten a little sick of Megafruit Paradise after six years, let me tell you).

What's worse, neither of those previous Parties ever expanded itself by way of DLC, which still seems like such an oversight to this day. Why not sell a couple of extra boards after a year or so has gone by, to extend the games' shelf life and replayability? Alas, it never happened.

But! Things are looking a bit more jam-packed for Jamboree. The number of playable boards here isn't immense, but with a total of seven different options included, the selection seems much more generous than the old five (or the piddly four). This time around there will be five all-new boards, plus two making their return from the series' oldest installments.

BOARD BY BOARD

Let's evaluate each of the offerings, beginning with the bold new Goomba Lagoon (seen below). It's an island-hopping stage in which rising and falling tides will affect which spaces are traversable, and its huge central volcano will occasionally blow its top!

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: NDCUBE
RELEASE: OCTOBER 17, 2024 RATING: E

The eruption will send Gold Goombas sailing out across the board. Perhaps tracking them down and stomping them will earn players extra coins?

Mega Wiggler's Tree Party is a new forest-themed board with a massive Wiggler living in a circular valley in the middle of the map. The Wiggler will sometimes move within that home circle, which will change the pathway for players since a few spaces are placed on its back.

Rainbow Galleria is a new shopping mall-themed board (a retail rival to the Mario Kart series' Coconut Mall, no doubt), and it boasts escalators that can carry players between floors, as well as "flash sales" that will lower the price of Stars to just 10 coins apiece!

King Bowser's Keep is the series' latest take on the Koopa King's lava-filled castle, and features Bowser himself in gigantic form standing in its center, looming over all the players.

The final all-new board, Roll 'em Raceway, has a unique twist: When playing it, all the characters will zip around the board while driving speedy racecars, rather than traveling on foot. It features an item that looks to be obtainable only on that board: the Turbo Dice, which lets you roll four 10-sided dice all at once, meaning you could move as many as 40 spaces in a single turn! (Speedy indeed!)

Lastly, the two returning stages are Western Land from Mario Party 2, and Mario's Rainbow Castle from the very first Mario Party game (which is now over 25 years old!). Like the returning boards in Superstars three years ago, both of these have been given fresh, gorgeous graphical upgrades. And I can't wait to revisit them both!

Western Land was always my favorite, decades ago, since in Mario Party 2 all the characters dressed up as cowboys when playing on that one.

AN UNRIVALED ROSTER?

I don't think that kind of costume content for the characters has made the cut for this new sequel, but players should still be pretty pleased at the playable options presented here. Super Mario Party featured 20 different choices six years ago, then Superstars cut the roster in half and only had 10 in 2021. Now we're being bumped back up to 20 again – plus at least one newcomer, for a total of 21!

The happy-go-lucky, somewhat shrimpy shinobi first seen in Super Mario Bros. 2, Ninji, is joining the Mario Party playable cast for the first time ever! Toad, Toadette and Spike (the spiked-ball-spitting little enemy, not the Wrecking Crew foreman) have rotated back into the roster too, while Hammer Bro, Dry Bones, Pom Pom and Diddy Kong seem to have been sidelined. But it's possible that they'll be unlockable, so hold out hope there!

One last curiosity on the roster is Bowser, who looks to be a playable option sometimes, but maybe not always? Bowser appears as a massive NPC or minigame opponent in some scenes, and just another of the many playable characters in others. Perhaps he'll be unavailable to select in some modes. Or else maybe we'll get to fight Bowser *as* Bowser? We'll see!

MASSIVE ONLINE MULTIPLAYER

Bowser seems like he may be off-limits in the new Koopathlon mode, a huge online challenge in which 20 players from around the world will come together to fight for Party glory simultaneously! The Mario Party series has offered some online multiplayer options in the past, but this is by far the biggest and boldest online offering yet, and it has me intrigued. If it can keep up with the action of 20 players all at once without lagging, it could be a real blast to play! That seems like a lot to process at the same time, but then most Mario Party minigames call for only simple inputs, so the servers won't be straining under complex sequences of button presses as in the Splatoon series. It should be fine.

MORE IN STORE?

Nintendo may still be holding some secrets about this sequel close to their chest as its October release draws near, as their official website is teasing that "Koopathlon is just one of a slew of additional modes." A *slew*, you say? A slew means quite a few, so if you're using that language, Nintendo, I'm going to hold you to it! I do hope that one of those modes ends up being Partner Party, which is our family's favorite mode in Super Mario Party. We were bummed it wasn't brought back in Superstars. But they brought back the *Super* for this game's name, so maybe it'll be back too? — **LUCAS**

LEGO HORIZON ADVENTURES

PlayStation's latest leading lady jumps to the Switch?!

HYPE WAS HIGH for the launch of the Nintendo Switch in early 2017, with millions of eager gamers anxious to get their journeys started in the grand new open world of The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. Competitors, of course, did what they could to hinder that hype cycle, deflect attention from Nintendo's products and redirect gamers' focus to their own wares. The biggest counterpunch was thrown by Sony, who debuted the incredible-looking Horizon Zero Dawn – *three days* before the Switch launch.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: PLAYSTATION PUBLISHING DEVELOPERS: GUERILLA & STUDIO GOBO RELEASE: HOLIDAY 2024 RATING: E10+

Horizon offered a bold, beautiful open world of its own, taking place in a farflung future vision of Earth filled with rampaging robotic dinosaurs. Taking players on a journey to explore this post-apocalyptic planet was Aloy, a brand-new female hero on a quest to discover the truth of her own identity. Aloy is incredibly combat-capable, dynamically dashing around the battlefield, taking down massive mechanical beasts with ancient weapons like a bow and arrow, but then also embracing futuristic tech that she scavenges from the collapsed chassis of her felled and fallen robo foes.

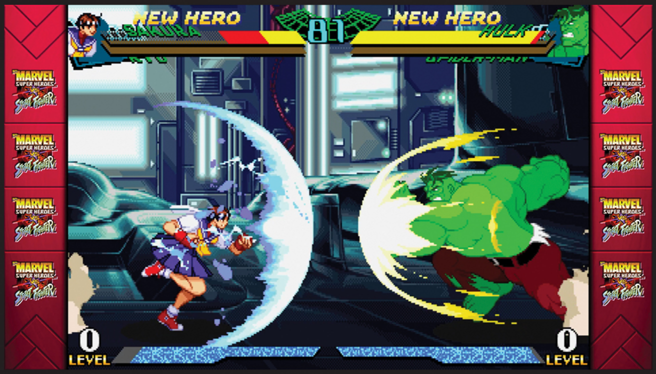
But how effective of a fighter will Aloy be when she's forced into the form of a two-inch LEGO minifigure?

The video game industry must've come a long way in the last seven years, as when Sony was making every effort to pull players away from the Big N's ecosystem with Horizon Zero Dawn at the dawn of the Switch era, I never would've imagined that now, at the end of that same era, PlayStation Publishing would be bringing their products out on Nintendo's platform themselves. But sure enough, that's the reality before us, as Sony has teamed up with the legendary LEGO brand for an all-new Horizon series spin-off, and is sharing the love by publishing it both on their PlayStation systems and the Switch as well.

LEGO Horizon Adventures presents a light-hearted retelling of the tale of Zero Dawn, so any Nintendo-loyal gamers who've never played Horizon before can jump in here and won't miss any of the source series' story beats. As in that 2017 original game, too, Aloy will go on a journey of self-discovery and do battle with lots of giant robot dino beasts, but this time those beasts will all be made of LEGO bricks – and combat will be a lot easier for younger gamers to handle, too.

Aloy won't have to fight alone, as two-player co-op will be supported here. And some LEGO-building creativity is getting tossed into the mix too, as Aloy's home village of Mother's Heart will be upgradeable and customizable as you progress through the quest.

I'm still a little shocked that this is a real game, as its existence really has a hard time jelling with my brain that was formed in the Console Wars era of the '90s. But hey, I'm happy for Sony and Nintendo to get along! **– LUCAS**



MARVEL VS. CAPCOM
FIGHTING COLLECTION: ARCADE CLASSICS

Surprise! Capcom's going to take you for a ride all over again!

SEVEN YEARS AGO, Marvel vs. Capcom Infinite did this franchise absolutely no favors. (Of course, it could be argued that the combined forces of Capcom and Disney did it no favors, either, but that's neither here nor there.) Infinite was not what fans of the franchise were wanting, and it didn't perform the way Capcom wanted it to. New EVO darling, it was not.

You'd be perfectly justified in thinking that it killed the franchise outright, and torched anything resembling good will between the two companies, deterring them from ever working together again. You would also not be alone in that belief.

Which is why, after seven long years of nothingness, the announcement of Marvel vs. Capcom Fighting Collection: Arcade Classics came as such a surprise during the June 2024 Nintendo Direct! Nay, it wasn't just a surprise — for those who'd given up hope, it was nothing short of a bombshell, one that completely eclipsed any other reveal in that event.

The existence of this collection is a miracle in itself, but further making it even greater for fans of the series is the fact that outside of the arcades, this selection of titles has never been available all in the same console format before. The original Marvel vs. Capcom: Clash of Super Heroes, for example, was only ever brought home in true-to-arcade form on the ill-fated Dreamcast in its heyday. (The original Sony PlayStation did receive a version, but without the tag mechanics.) Years later, it would see a digital release in Marvel vs. Capcom Origins, but that one was delisted in 2014.

What's more, if you're a dyed-in-the-wool Nintendo purist, then this is quite likely your first chance to experience *any* of these titles, as they're all making their Nintendo platform debut on the Nintendo Switch. At long last, a bitter pill to swallow has . . . I don't know how to finish that analogy. It's been fixed, let's just say that.

The collection will include X-Men: Children of the Atom, Marvel Super Heroes, X-Men vs. Street Fighter, Marvel Super Heroes vs. Street Fighter, Marvel vs. Capcom: Clash of Super Heroes and Marvel vs. Capcom 2: New Age of Heroes. In addition to all of those fighting game classics, it *also* includes the arcade version of Capcom's The Punisher beat-'em-up.

For those thinking that's an odd inclusion: Perhaps, but The Punisher was the very game that established the relationship between these two titans of the '90s to begin with. Plus, it only ever saw a home port on the Genesis, so it brings a fair bit of historical value to the package in its own right.

MVCFC:AC also promises a slew of new and updated features, including online play with rollback netcode, casual, ranked and custom matches, online co-op and spectating for The Punisher, high score challenges, a training mode, display filters, quick saves, one-button specials, difficulty settings and art and sound galleries. Plus, you can call up each game's arcade marquee at any time, to refresh yourself on how to perform everyone's special moves!

Let's get crazy when Marvel vs. Capcom takes us for a ride once again this November! **— DAVID**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RELEASE: NOVEMBER 22, 2024 RATING: T

METROID PRIME 4: BEYOND

Seven years after it was announced, we've got our first look at gameplay.

WHAT WERE YOU up to back in the summer of 2017?

Maybe you were enjoying the first months of the Nintendo Switch life cycle as an early adopter, making your way through Breath of the Wild or racing against your friends in the just recently re-released Deluxe version of Mario Kart 8.

Maybe you hadn't yet jumped into the Switch generation, but were planning to do so when promising future titles like Super Mario Odyssey made their debut later that year.

Maybe you weren't even born yet! Because enough time has actually passed that you could've been a baby in 2017, had seven different birthdays *and* learned to read to be able to be reading this article right now . . . all in the time it took Nintendo to finally give us our first real look at Metroid Prime 4. (If that's you, then hi kids!)

Yes, it's been an incredibly long wait. But the wait was worth it!

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: RETRO STUDIOS RELEASE: TBA 2025 RATING: RP

NO LONGER JUST A LOGO

Nintendo shocked the gaming world in June 2017 by simply including a logo for Metroid Prime 4 among their many E3 announcements that year. But the game's development has taken so long that that old logo is all we'd officially seen of the game until this past June, here in 2024. Blessedly, mercifully and once again shockingly, Nintendo re-revealed the existence of this long-awaited Prime series sequel. But they gave us a whole lot more than a logo to look at this time around!

We've got gameplay! Honest-to-goodness actual footage of Samus Aran in action once again, in a brand-new first-person adventure. This trail-blazing leading lady hasn't just been resting on her laurels throughout the last seven years – since June 2017 we've seen the release of both Metroid: Samus Returns on the 3DS and Metroid Dread on the Switch. But those were both 2D sidescrollers; the 3D Prime games under the Metroid brand umbrella are a whole 'nother beast. That sub-series and its unique "behind the visor" view hasn't had a true sequel since the Wii era: The last one, Metroid Prime 3: Corruption, shipped for the Wii in August 2007! (Yes, we got the spin-off Federation Force in 2016. But Samus was side-lined for that one in favor of players playing as generic troopers instead.)

So, finally, we're back. And we are *so* back. Metroid Prime 4 advances the series' story further into the future and kicks off with a bang. Literally! Players take control of Samus in this new sequel and she's instantly entrenched in the middle of an active war zone, as Space Pirates have launched an assault on a Galactic Federation research facility, and Samus has been sent to help repel the attack and assist any survivors who might still be alive amidst the chaos.

It's a striking scene right from the start: The Space Pirates are charging the walls on foot and exchanging fire with the friendly forces trying to hold them back, and meanwhile massive blasts are raining down from above in a brilliant and brutal display of orbital bombardment. Samus, undeterred, dashes straight into this frantic fray.

HEADS UP, SAMUS!

The critical immersion-enhancing innovation that made the first Metroid Prime game so cool back in the GameCube days is the fact that we, as the players, get to see through Samus' eyes in a unique way. The "camera" capturing the action in these games is placed inside Samus' signature helmet, so all of her vital information like her remaining health and her total complement of missiles is digitally displayed on the inner surface of her visor. This HUD has been redesigned once again for Prime 4, and you can take in its new look from the screenshot on the left.

Every element has been unobtrusively placed in the edges and corners of Samus' view. Her health is centrally located up at the top, flanked by an enemy-tracking radar in the upper left and a map (with a compass) in the upper right. These are all the same as in the original game, and in the same spots. But looking down to the lower left, there's something different: Instead of a set of icons set aside to select between different visor views, there's now a D-Pad indicator with the Missile Launcher made active there.

That simple HUD switch-up brings up some interesting questions about the game design of Prime 4, right off the bat! Will switching between several different kinds of visors no longer be a part of the game design in this sequel? (Or minimized to the point where such functionality doesn't need to be constantly present on the HUD any more?)

We get another piece of evidence pointing toward that possibility. As Samus approaches a fallen Space Pirate on the ground, she begins to scan its body. Previously, that kind of action was only available after switching to a separate Scan Visor — but this time it looks like it may be automatic?

Scanning anything and everything in sight has always been my favorite activity when playing the Primes, so I won't be mad at all if that action has been streamlined for my convenience. But is it just on a separate button press now? It's hard to say quite yet.

AN ARSENAL OF ABILITIES

The Metroid series has been met with a bit of game design/lore consistency criticism in fandom discourse recently, as some fans (and naysayers) have called extra attention to the fact that Samus always loses her suit's entire suite of weapons and abilities at the beginning of every one of her quests. It admittedly is a little silly, story-wise — you'd think that she'd just keep all of her upgrades from her previous adventures active and at the ready to use again whenever the next threat to the galaxy rears its ugly head. But, no, she always starts over from zero.

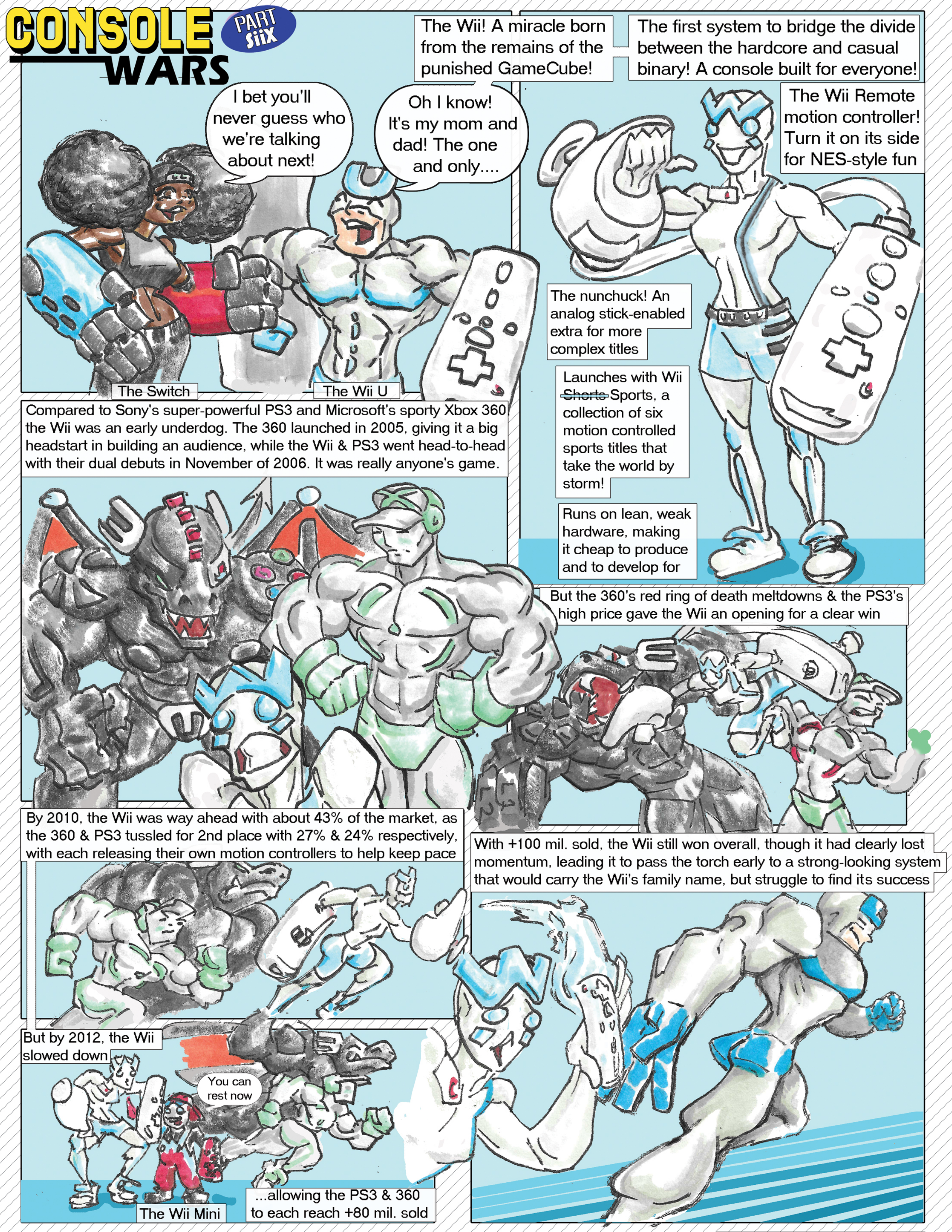
Game design-wise, of course, it makes perfect sense. It wouldn't feel that fun to be armed to the teeth from the first minute in a video game that's meant to be about exploring and expanding your capabilities over time. You've got to learn and grow and develop over the course of the quest, in order to really feel accomplished! (But maybe Nintendo could add a New Game Plus option to Metroid games in the future, to let players replay the whole campaign from the beginning with all the upgrades unlocked. That would be a nice compromise.)

All that to say, Samus will once again start with next to nothing in the way of abilities here in Prime 4. The Missile Launcher, 99 units of health and the Morph Ball power that lets her roll up into a shiny sphere and fit into tight spaces like air vents look like all she'll get for starters this time. (And the Scan Visor, if that still counts.)

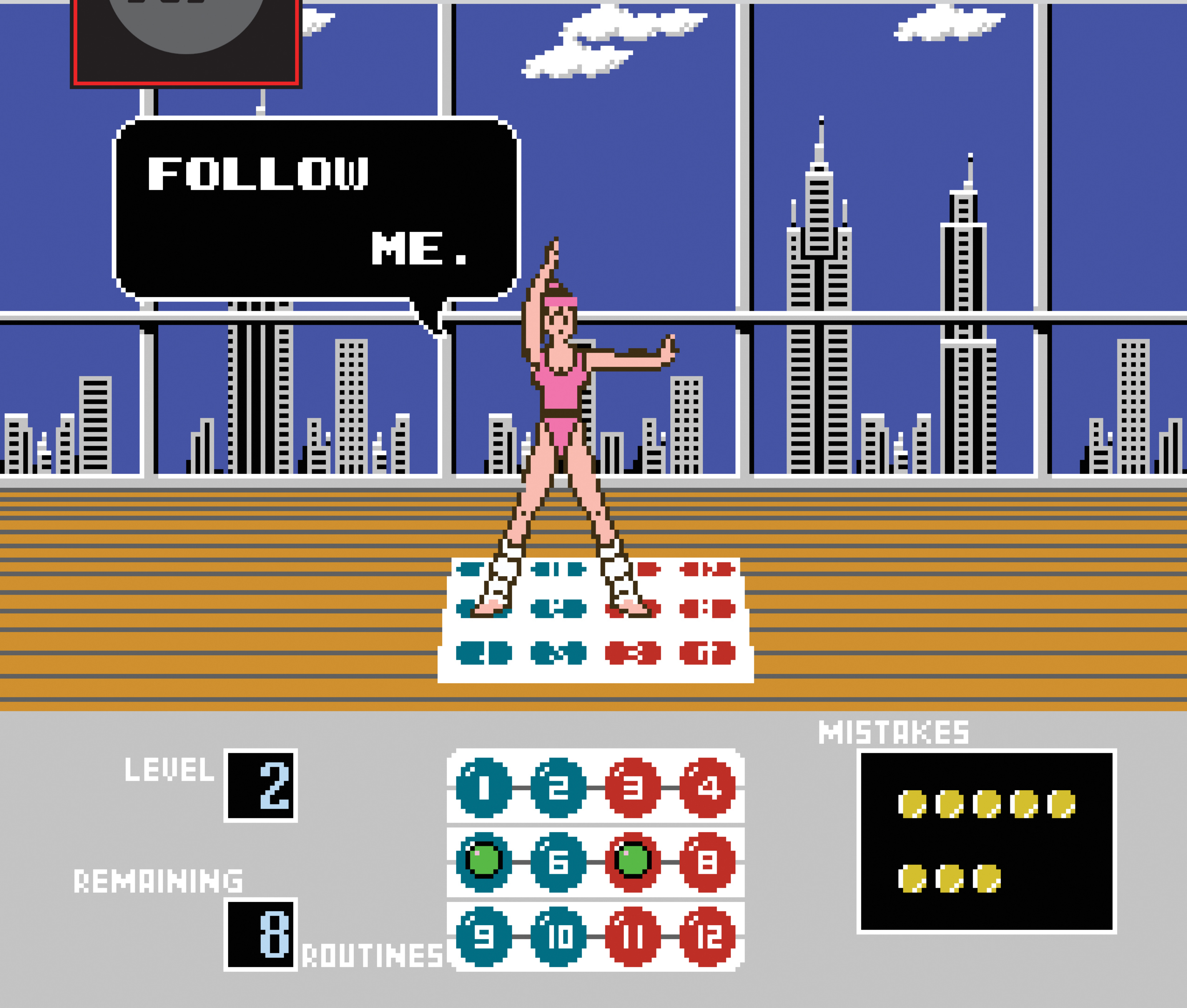
Beyond that, though, we've got a blank slate of nothing but fresh possibilities. Will we get all the old classics back again, like the Ice Beam and the Power Bombs and the Screw Attack? Or will Retro surprise us with some all-new toys that no previous Metroid game has ever given Samus before? I can't wait to find out!

NEW GAME IN THE NEW YEAR

And we won't have to wait much longer. After seeing the calendar flip seven times before being granted this first glimpse at Prime 4 gameplay, we'll need to only make it through one more New Year's Eve before the game is finally released at some point in 2025. Will it be the Switch 1 swan song? Or could this potentially be a cross-gen title that will also be made available on the still-unrevealed Switch 2? We'll know all those answers soon. I promise! **— LUCAS**



BY JONATHAN HOLMES & PETE MARSHALL



HONORING THE INSTRUCTOR

DANCE AEROBICS
NES, 1989

We've spotlighted Samus Aran several times for her role as one of Nintendo's earliest leading ladies, and also honored Princess Peach and Nana from Ice Climber and even Clu Clu Land's Bubbles the Bubblefish all for advancing gender equality in the Big N's first console era. But we've never before recognized the pioneering role of this woman, who was known simply as the Instructor! A full three decades before the Ring Fit Trainee's first run and nearly 20 years before Wii Fit Trainer made her debut, the Instructor served as the prototype for that kind of fitness-focused coach/avatar character, guiding the exercise-minded NES players of 1989 through a series of steps across the foot-powered NES Power Pad. Dance Aerobics wasn't developed by Nintendo, but was published by them in North America, so the Instructor can claim a spot in the first-party family. **— LUCAS**

TRAPPED IN THE PAST
BALLOON KID

One of Nintendo's earliest leading ladies has drifted away on the wind.

DO YOU HAVE younger siblings?

And, if you do, have you ever wished that they would just leave you alone? Little brothers and sisters can sometimes be annoying, and older kids know that, sometimes, dark thoughts can creep into our minds as we wish that they would just disappear!

This is the plot of the movie Labyrinth, starring Jennifer Connelly. But maybe also Balloon Kid!

The opening cutscene of this 1990 Game Boy adventure shows a big sister named Alice freaking out as she watches her little brother (with balloons attached to his back) get swept away by a gust of wind. It's unknown whether young Jim was being annoying and Alice had wished for some misfortune to befall him, but we'll give her the benefit of the doubt and say that it was a random accident, that she truly loves her brother and that she's never once had a negative thought about him.

Alice's answer to this cyclonic crisis is to also strap balloons to her own back and start to float off in pursuit of her helpless sibling. Thus begins the journey of Balloon Kid, a right-to-left sidescrolling platformer adventure that is one of the few true follow-ups ever made to Nintendo's Balloon Fight – and both of them are personal favorites due in large part to Satoru Iwata's involvement in the series.

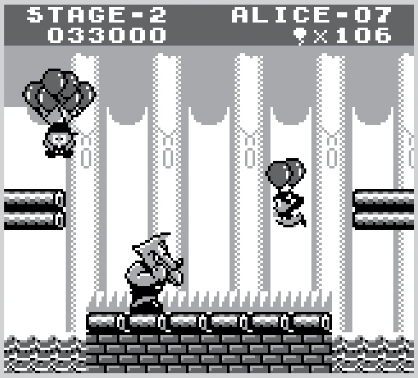
But Balloon Kid is currently unavailable! Alice may not be the most notable of Nintendo's leading ladies, but she was one of the earliest female heroes from the company, so it stinks that her one and only game is not accessible as of this writing. (Unless you track down an original Game Boy cartridge from 34 years ago, of course.)

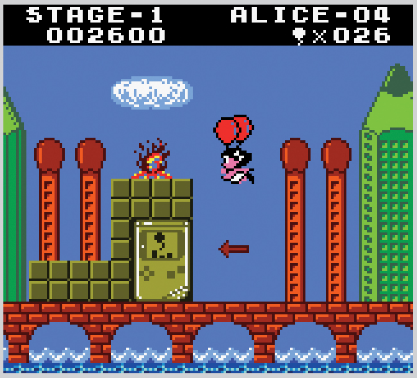
Balloon Kid is one of the Nintendo classics that got culled when the Wii U and 3DS eShops got shot down last year. It had been available before then, as a 3DS Virtual Console download for just a few dollars – but now it's fallen into that limbo of games that *seem* likely to be added to the Nintendo Switch Online lineup at some point in the future, but just haven't yet.

And then there are the question marks surrounding that service too! With Switch 1 phasing out and Switch 2 hopefully about to be unveiled, where will the current NSO game libraries factor in during that transition? If all the games that are already there continue to be there and are just instantly made available on the next-gen hardware, that'll be a good sign for legacy titles like Balloon Kid here – it will have good odds of still joining the lineup in the Switch 2 era if it doesn't make the cut beforehand. But if Nintendo hits the retro selection reset button *again*, and we once again have to restart with the heavy hitters like Super Mario Bros. getting another new release date on Switch 2 and so on, then poor little Alice may be left ignored for years to come.

Whenever it finally does reappear – whether sooner or later – I recommend giving it a try! It's a fairly simple but fun forced-scrolling adventure in which you must manage Alice's balloons. Most of the time you're flapping around through the sky, but sometimes you have to detach the balloons and go on foot to fit through tight spaces or battle bosses with Mario-style stomps on their noggins.

Balloon Kid will hopefully drift our way again soon, either in its original format or its colorized GBC edition, which was only ever released in Japan! That's my real wish. (And it's a kinder wish than wishing for your little brother to fly away.) **— LUCAS**

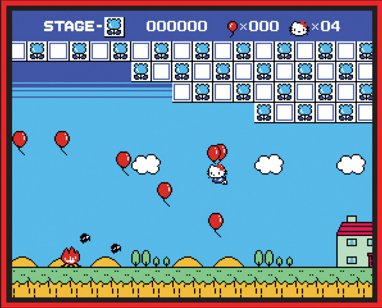




ORIGINAL RELEASE: GAME BOY, OCTOBER 5, 1990 PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: PAX SOFTNICA

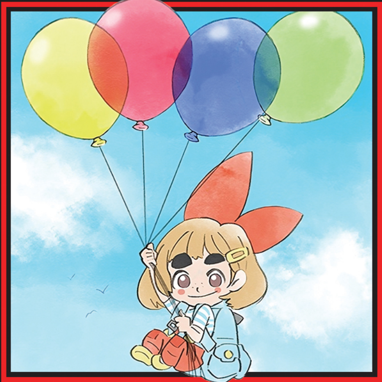
PLAYING IT TODAY

Currently the only legal way to own and play Balloon Kid is to get your hands on an original cartridge – there are several listings on eBay between $15 and $20. Or maybe you happened to download it onto your 3DS before the eShop shut down last year? Beyond those options, we're just waiting for its next re-release.



HELLO, KITTY!

Well, there is one other option – Balloon Kid was actually ported to the Famicom in Japan! But if you seek out one of those cartridges, you need to search for "Hello Kitty World" instead – since the Hello Kitty brand was attached to the same adventure specifically for Japan's players. Its levels feel more open with the larger screen too.



ALICE, IS THAT YOU?

While Alice herself has never returned to the spotlight, there is a new character in the WarioWare series who has copied her whole vibe: Lulu! First introduced in WarioWare Gold in 2018, Lulu was given a character introduction trailer in which she drifted around with a balloon on her back and even defeated a Balloon Fight enemy, so it's clearly a deliberate homage. She fought off a fish trying to swallow her in WarioWare: Move It! and controls like Alice in WarioWare: Get It Together!, strengthening the connection.

LOST IN UNTRANSLATION
MAGIC KNIGHT RAYEARTH

It's up to three eighth-grade girls to save a magical world!

ORIGINAL RELEASE: SUPER FAMICOM, SEPTEMBER 29, 1995
PUBLISHER: TOMY
DEVELOPER: PANDORA BOX

PLAYING IT TODAY

In a testament to how fervent the fandom of the Rayearth franchise was in the '90s, this game scored a fan translation in 1999, just four years after its launch in Japan. That remained the best way for English audiences to play it until just two years ago, when the same translation was revisited, polished up and modernized with a new font, a hack to increase the space available for displaying names and more. It's really an impressive amount of work, so search for "Magic Knight Rayearth English Retranslation from mteam" to learn more.

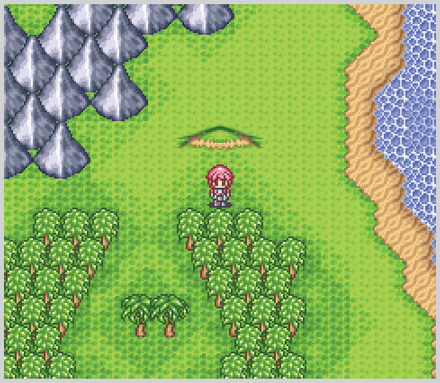
THIRTY YEARS AGO, before "isekai" became a verb, Magic Knight Rayearth was one of the biggest multimedia properties in Japan, spanning a six-volume manga, a 49-episode anime (with a 30th anniversary new anime project recently announced!), three OVAs loosely based on the original story as well as several video games. Created by the four-woman team CLAMP, it combined elements of magical girl, sword & sorcery and mecha stories to reach a wider audience than the pre-teen demographic it originally targeted. While Working Designs' English translation of the Sega Saturn version is much more widely known outside of Japan, Tomy released a Super Famicom RPG based on the anime in 1995.

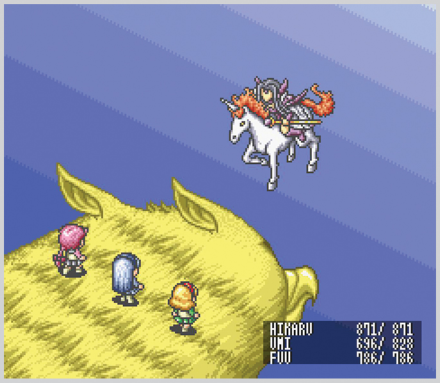
After crossing paths during their schools' field trips to Tokyo Tower, three junior high school girls – Hikaru Shidou, Umi Ryuzaki and Fuu Hououji – are summoned to the magical world of Cephiro. There they're met by Clef, who gives them their mission: to save Princess Emeraude, the Pillar of Cephiro. Emeraude's role as Pillar is to pray for Cephiro's protection, but with her gone from her post, monsters have started to multiply and the world itself is at risk of crumbling to dust. Her captor Zagato has amassed a small army of followers – the sorceress Alcyone, summoner Ascot, hypnotic dancer Caldina, Emeraude's former bodyguard Lafarga and Innova, his right-hand man – and they'll all stop at *nothing* to prevent the girls from saving the princess.

The girls' missions involve learning their innate magic spells, forging their own weapons and finding and reawakening the three Mashin, or Rune Gods – Rayearth, Celes and Windam – to gain the power to defeat Zagato and his minions. On their way, they gain important allies, like Ferio, a mercenary who charms Fuu, and Presea, a weaponsmith who creates their personal swords. Last but not least is Mokona, an egg-shaped, rabbit-eared creature that can only say "Puu!" and is able to act as a two-way communicator, as well as create both a flying boat and a fully equipped emergency shelter for the girls. Not bad for a mascot character! However, despite the girls' musings about their quest being just like a video game, Rayearth is famous for its shocking ending – the girls find out, much too late, exactly what they're saving Cephiro *from*, and what they need to do to save it.

Magic Knight Rayearth is a traditional turn-based RPG, albeit with a bit of a difficulty curve and a very high encounter rate compared to other games from its era. Unlike other RPGs, weapons and armor are automatically included, and they level up along with the characters as you achieve the main goals. It's also an RPG that *requires* knowledge of the story to proceed: For example, when Fuu is forced to battle Hikaru and Umi, who have been turned into puppets by Caldina, you're *supposed* to lose to them. Defeating them nets you an instant Game Over! Also, there's a bonus ending that softens the anime and manga ending's impact: Instead of being instantly whisked home after fulfilling their mission, the girls have a chance to say goodbye to their new friends and allies.

Aside from this game and its Sega Saturn version, there were other Rayearth games released on other consoles, including the Game Boy, Sega Pico (remember that?) and two games for the Game Gear, which got its own custom red console to match Rayearth. Also, the girls – and their Rune Gods – had cameos in the last two Super Robot Wars titles, which were released with English translations in Asia. The video game ties don't end there: The anime's music was composed by Hayato Matsuo, who studied under Dragon Quest's Koichi Sugiyama and was the composer for Ogre Battle: The March of the Black Queen on the SNES! **– REBECCA**





WARP ZONE

What Nintendo Power was writing about way back when.

YOU'RE NOT SEEING double! The cover for the 124th issue of Nintendo Power magazine featured one of Rare's many games for the Nintendo 64, Jet Force Gemini! (Which, it so happens, is currently available on the NSO Expansion Pass.)

Joining its seven pages of coverage were Gauntlet Legends, NFL Blitz 2000, Gex 3: Deep Cover Gecko, Re-Volt, Shadow Man (no relation to Dr. Wily's space ninja Robot Master) and Hybrid Heaven, which didn't turn out to be the Metal Gear counterpart Konami was hoping it would be. It even had one side of this issue's poster, with 40 Winks occupying the other side. (Though 40 Winks ended up being cancelled for the N64 — only to later be Kickstarted and finally released in 2019!)

Those looking to pack their power portably could take Disney's Tarzan for a swing, explore the world of Revelations: The Demon Slayer, experience NES classics Déjà Vu I & II all over again, and enjoy the merry melodies of Looney Tunes.

Other features included looks at StarCraft 64 and Sprocket (later renamed Rocket: Robot on Wheels), as well as a short strategy guide for the latest additions to the Nintendo Player's Choice lineup: Ocarina of Time, Banjo-Kazooie, Rogue Squadron, 1080° Snowboarding and Yoshi's Story. And, as Nintendo Power liked to do on occasion, they pit two sports games against each other to see which was the champ and which was the chump. In this case, it was Madden NFL 2000 going against NFL Quarterback Club. Plus, the Pokécenter section was now expanded to FIVE pages! That's not even including the 16-page Pokémon comic — and if that wasn't enough Pokémon Power for you, this month's Player's Poll sent the grand prize winner to Hollywood for a tour of Warner Bros. Studios and a special screening of Pokémon: The First Movie.

Closing things out in Pak Watch, we got a little more Dolphin teasing, with Factor 5 and Applied Microsystems joining its new Dream Team. Upcoming titles included Toy Story 2 and World Championship Wrestling's first entry in partnership with EA, WCW Mayhem. Oh, and a Space World preview featuring "Zelda Gaiden!"

Taking the cover of Issue #125 was the "third version" game of Pokémon's first generation, Pokémon Yellow, featuring the anime versions of Ash and Pikachu running from a Predator. (Well, maybe not a Predator, but it looked like *something* was chasing them through the woods.)

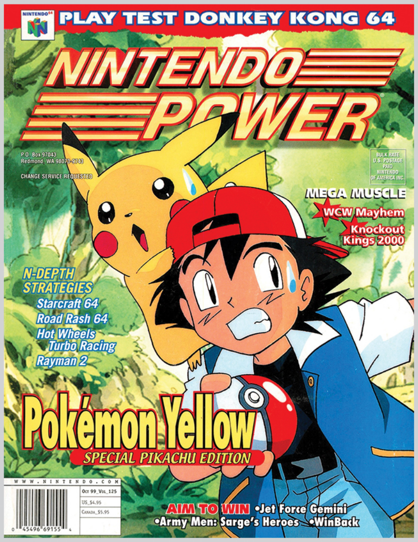
If the 10-year-old and his electric rodent weren't up to the task, maybe they could find some help from heroes in one of the other featured games this issue: Jet Force Gemini, Army Men: Sarge's Heroes, StarCraft 64 (sharing poster space with Catwoman for Game Boy), Road Rash 64, WinBack, Hot Wheels Turbo Racing, Rayman 2: The Great Escape, WCW Mayhem and Knockout Kings 2000 all seem well suited to repelling Predators in their own ways. Or perhaps it would be better left to the 800-pound gorilla in the room, as Donkey Kong 64 was here with a special feature for in-store demo strategies.

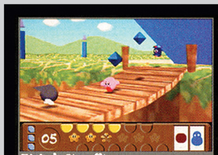
For this issue's Player's Poll, the grand prize winners would get to go see the Las Vegas round of the EA Sports Supercross Series. If that wasn't your speed, another contest in this issue presented a chance to be one of 1,000 Power Players to receive a Surfing Pikachu.

This issue's Pak Watch pulled back the curtain on the then-upcoming Game Boy Advance. Other games featured included THQ's inaugural WWF offering, WrestleMania 2000, Earthworm Jim's attempt to go 3D and a crossover we'll never get to see as Xena: Warrior Princess and Turok: Rage Wars shared a page. Plus, a look at Space World '99, with more Zelda Gaiden, Zelda: Fruit of the Mysterious Tree for Game Boy Color, Talent Studio and a variety of other titles, as seen below! **— DAVID**

ISSUE #124: SEPTEMBER 1999

ISSUE #125: OCTOBER 1999




Kirby's Star 64

Our favorite pink hero fights an evil eye that possesses his friends in this 3-D side-scroller. We got Kirby to spout magma volcano-style, turn into a bomb, grow spikes, catch fire, and blow ice—and that's the tip of the iceberg.

Mother 3 (Earthbound 64)

The long-anticipated N64 incarnation of Earthbound was rife with long, impressive cinema scenes and battle animations to die for. It's due out in Japan in the first quarter of 2000, but no word yet on a U.S. release...

Mario Party 2

The sequel to last year's smash multiplayer hit featured tons of new boards, including western and pirate themes, and all-new minigames. We saw everything from a foozball game to a Mario Kart-like, split-screen tank battle.

Custom Robo

This unique battle game has not been announced for the U.S. market, but after playing it, we hope it will be. Players customize miniature robots with fierce gear and then set them against each other on small battle arenas. Very cool.

Super Mario RPG 2

We couldn't take our eyes off the novel look of this sequel. With 2-D characters inhabiting a 3-D environment, it presents a totally unique graphical presentation. Fans of the first Mario RPG will love the new look.

Doshin: The Giant 1

A DD title that we earnestly hope might convert to the N64, Doshin is alternately a village's best pal and its worst nightmare. You can alter the entire landscape by helping people with Yellow Doshin or ripping the earth up as Evil Doshin.

Pokémon Gold and Silver

Slated for release in Japan this November, the two new Pokémon games include at least 100 new Pokémon above the original 150. Word is, the new Pokémon will have genders, and so there may be new species beyond that number...

Mr. Itoi's Bass Fishing

Although the prototype fishing rod controller was merely displayed and not yet functional, this fishing game still impressed the crowd with excellent control and beautiful underwater graphics of the fight between man and fish.

DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH
June 6, 1987, in Los Angeles, California

FAVORITE FOOD
Gummy Bears

CURRENT POSITION IN THE INDUSTRY
Independent Artist and Game Developer

BEST KNOWN FOR
2D art and animation in Skullgirls and Indivisible, being the Creative Lead for Clock Tower: Rewind

MARIEL CARTWRIGHT

Following up on our original interview from 10 years ago! How much has changed in the last decade?

INTERVIEW BY JONATHAN HOLMES

NF: When we last caught up, you were doing a lot of freelance animation work for WayForward while continuing to build an audience for Skullgirls, the indie fighting game you co-created. How have things changed for you over the last 10 years? And what, if anything, has stayed the same?
MARIEL CARTWRIGHT: I can't believe it's been that long! I've been a part of a few shipped titles since then, and I've learned quite a lot. I think the biggest change is just in myself – I have a much broader range of skills, but I've also learned that there's a lot more to doing good work than technical skill, and there's more that I want to do beyond just art. I love working on projects where I'm in a position to take a bird's-eye view – do the art, narrative and design come together cohesively? What are the constraints we have, and how do we work within them? I still have the passion to just draw cool stuff like I did early in my career, but taking on roles where I can step back and see how everything comes together and help guide that process is something I've become really excited about.

It's amazing that you've taken the well-deserved position of Creative Lead on the Clock Tower: Rewind project for WayForward. How did you end up in that position, and what's it been like to make the leap from animation director to overseer of such a historic release?
It's really been such an honor. Clock Tower has been one of my favorite games since my early teens, and I even spent a couple years developing a title that was inspired by it – it's really had such a huge influence on me. I've had a great relationship with WayForward for many years now, so when they got the opportunity to work on a new release of Clock Tower, my name came up as the right person to lead the project. It was really just a lucky coincidence! It's definitely a lot of pressure, though – I know tons of people out there care about the game as deeply as I do, so I want to make sure I'm doing as good of a job as I can.

For those who have never played Clock Tower, but have played Silent Hill, Fatal Frame, Resident Evil, Lone Survivor or any of the many other horror games that were influenced by it, how would you describe the game's importance to the evolution of the survival horror genre, and why should we give it a try, despite the fact that it's not always "fun" in the conventional sense?
One of the reasons Clock Tower is so special is that I think it holds up as a genuinely scary game! I couldn't play it for more than a few minutes at a time when I first discovered it because I found it so scary. It's such a great example of how you can build tension and atmosphere with whatever medium you're working in. You might think that'd be hard to achieve with 16-bit graphics and gameplay, but you'd be surprised at how well Clock Tower pulls it off. It's true survival horror – all you can really do is survive, as you don't have the tools to go on the offensive. And it's not a violent or gory game, either – it really is all about the tension and your limited resources. It's really done so masterfully and I encourage any horror fan to check it out!

Clock Tower instills the player with a deep sense of empathy for Jennifer, the main character. It's not often that SNES games make every effort to put you in the shoes of a young woman who's having one of the most confusing, anxious and horrific days in human history. What was it about the game that originally drew you to it, and what are some ways you do and don't relate to its lead?
I've always been a horror fan in general, but part of what makes Clock Tower so successful is that it has a clear premise with just the right amount of depth and complexity to make it compelling. There are only a few characters in the story and one antagonist chasing you, and you learn just enough about Jennifer to empathize with and care about her. I'll always gravitate toward horror with a woman lead, and Jennifer in particular – a normal teen girl – manages to survive an extraordinary situation with no more resources or weapons at her disposal than any other average girl might have. I think that's the appeal of Jennifer herself – she's someone you can really see yourself in.

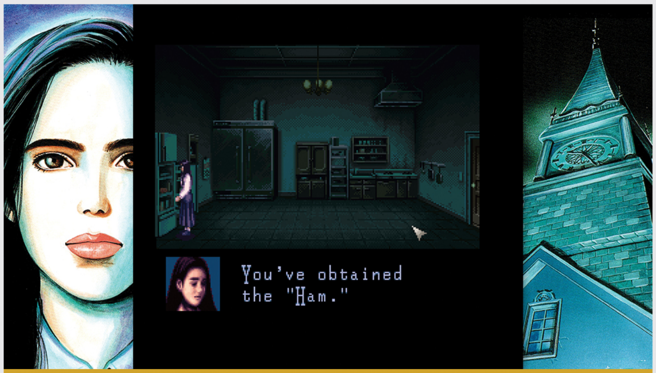
This new release of the game includes features from fan mods, including the ability for Jennifer to physically fight back against the previously untouchable, murderous Scissorman. What inspired you and the team to add these features to the game, and how did you go about coordinating their inclusion?
We were lucky to work with the fan community for the release of Clock Tower: Rewind, and really this wouldn't have been possible without them. For the enhancements you'll find in the game's Rewind mode, we reached out to the fan modder who helmed one particular mod, and worked with him to bring his enhancements to the game and worked with him to make them even better! It only made sense to work with the community in this regard, as they've been passionate about the game for many, many years prior to Clock Tower: Rewind even being a possibility.

A lot of the original team members behind Clock Tower are still in the industry, like Kazuyuki Kumagai, who designed the instruction booklet for the original Japanese release. He's currently a producer at Grasshopper Manufacture. Have you reached out to any of the original developers of the game in the process of producing this special edition of their work?
Yes! We were fortunate to be in touch with Hifumi Kono, the creator and director of Clock Tower. He gave us advice and feedback along the way, and even participated in a video interview that we included in the release. It was such a pleasure and honor to have him involved, and it's such a treat for fans to have the original director give new insight into the game he loves, especially after all this time.

When it comes to drawing women, monsters, and women who are monsters, you're one of the all-time greats. Have you ever worked on a pitch for an original Darkstalkers game? Given the success of the Skullgirls games, I'd imagine Capcom would be knocking down your door for a team-up . . .
A new hand-animated Darkstalkers game would be an absolute dream! It's definitely something I've thought about, and there *miiiight* have been a point where I explored what it could look like. Capcom, if you're listening . . . we can still make it happen!

Over the past 10 years, how have things for women in games – meaning the fictional characters

AFTER SEEING HER FRIEND FALL VICTIM TO A KILLER, THE CHASE IS ON AS JENNIFER TRIES TO AVOID THE SAME FATE.



WHILE CLOCK TOWER TELLS AN INTENSE STORY, THERE ARE A FEW MOMENTS OF LEVITY. DON'T MISS THE HAM!

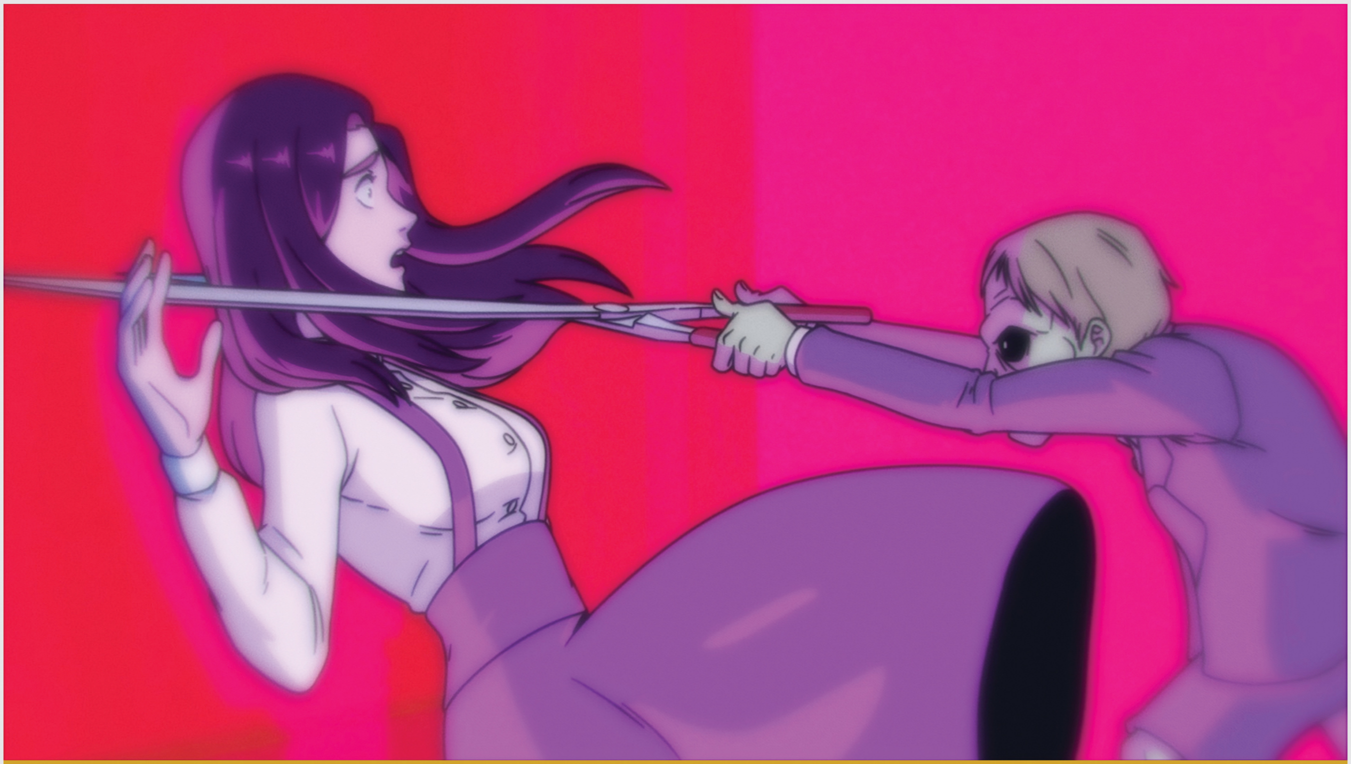
inside the games, as well as the people working behind the scenes creating them — changed for the better? (Or worse?)
We've come a long way in the last 10 years, but there are certainly areas where we can still improve, and I think that will continue to be the case for many years to come. I've been incredibly fortunate to work with some amazing people both inside and outside the video game industry, so I've personally found that day to day, I don't often run into issues because of my gender. Especially so if I'm working with a great team. However, I've certainly had my fair share of negative experiences that I think many women can relate to. We should continue to make space and listen to people of all different backgrounds and genders, to make sure we're creating environments and experiences that are equitable to everyone.

What's it like being a Creative Lead? How do the pros and cons of the role compare to your work as an animation director, comic artist, merch designer and box art illustrator?
Being the Creative Lead for Clock Tower: Rewind has been such a rewarding experience! Directing and animating a whole animated intro was a first for me, but it very quickly turned into a passion project, as I got to learn new things and flex my skills at the same time. Leading the project on the whole was so fun too, as I got to do more than just art — merch design, overseeing the translation, casting and directing the VO . . . really, every part of the process was great. I've found that, while I'm an artist at heart, I'm really energized by doing whatever I can to help make a project happen, whatever that looks like. While I'm pretty proud of my broad range of skills when it comes to art, I don't need to be doing just art to enjoy work if it's a great project with great people.

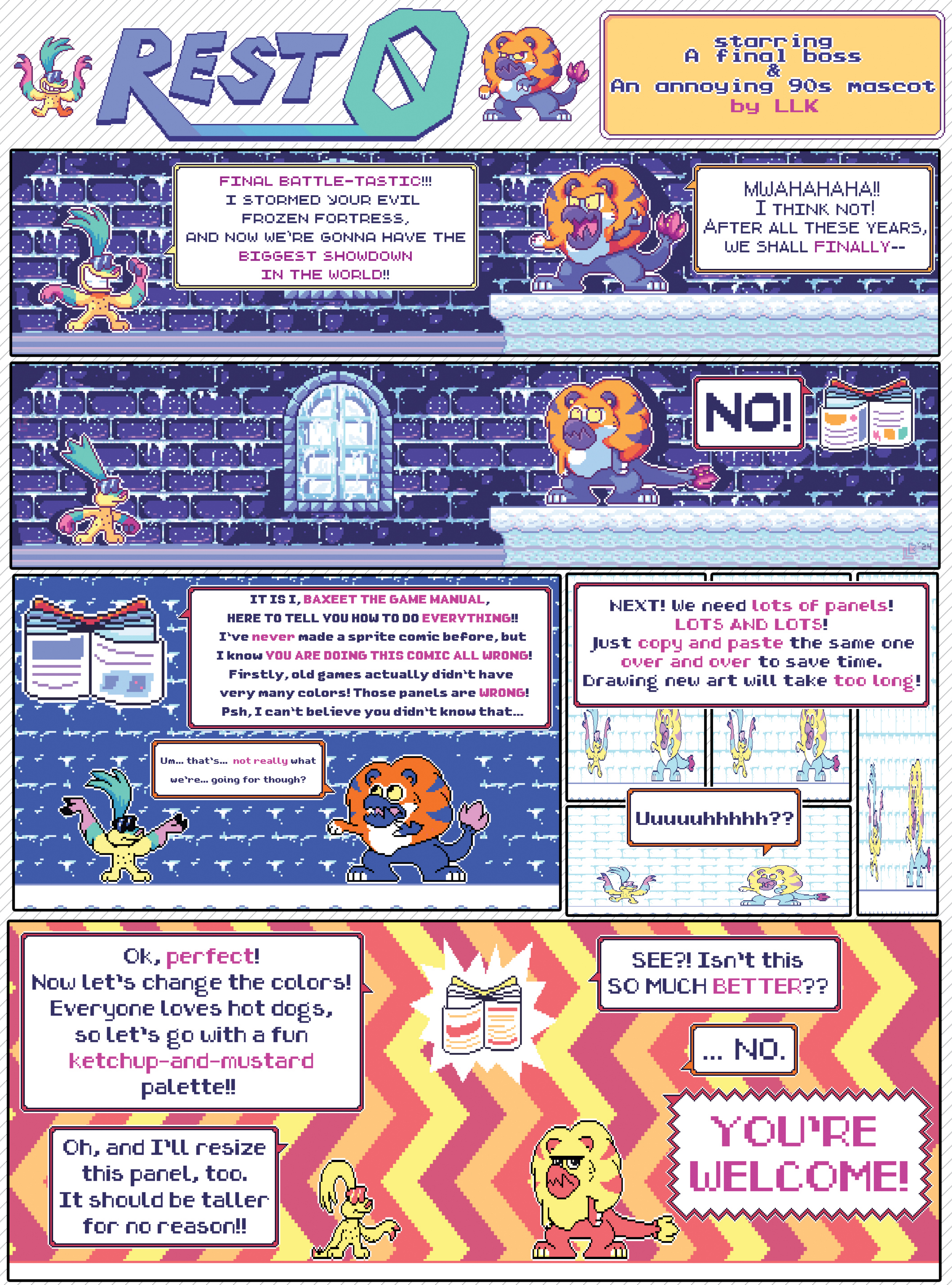
With an additional decade now under your belt, it's safe to say that you're officially an "industry veteran." What things have you learned that you wish you had known at the start of your career, and what skills are you still looking to learn in the future?
You know, that's a tough question! I wish I had better prioritized a good work/life balance earlier in my career, but at the same time, I might not have been as successful if I hadn't worked so hard. Truthfully, it's something I still struggle with — I'm a total workaholic, but I do try to take care of my physical and mental health a bit more now. As much as I'd like to think I'm just a work-producing machine, the wear and tear did catch up with me — I had to see an occupational therapist for a while — and it's certainly not gonna get better as I continue to get older. So I hope I can strike a balance of working hard but also making time to enjoy a life outside of work.

Last time we asked you if you could do anything with any Nintendo franchise, you said you'd work on making a new Animal Crossing game. So this time we'll ask, if you had an unlimited budget to create any new horror game for Nintendo, using established and/or new characters along the way, what would you make and why? It feels like Splatoon could make for a great body horror adventure . . .
A new Nintendo horror game, hmm . . . Splatoon is definitely a good one! I think there are a lot of elements in the Zelda games that are pretty scary, actually — it'd be easy to lean into that and go full horror with a Zelda game. The Majora's Mask moon, the Depths in Tears of the Kingdom . . . it wouldn't feel too out of place to see more like that!

And last time we talked, we closed the conversion by asking you what your ideal superpower would be. You told us you would love to be able to eat whatever you want without getting fat. Has your answer changed at all since then, or is guilt-free snacking still your ultimate dream?
That certainly sounds like the answer I would've given in my 20s! As much as good food is still important to me, I feel like my answer now is that I wish I could stop time. There's so much I want to do and there just isn't enough time to do it all — travel, learn to write music, learn to program, make an original short film or game. (Or both!) . . . I could go on. Just give me more time!



DON'T BE ALARMED! IN THIS STILL IMAGE CAPTURED FROM CLOCK TOWER: REWIND'S BRAND-NEW, FULLY ANIMATED INTRO SEQUENCE, IT DOES LOOK LIKE JENNIFER IS JUST ABOUT TO GET CLIPPED BY THE SINISTER SCISSORMAN. BUT SECONDS LATER, SHE DUCKS DOWN, DODGES OUT OF THE WAY AND MAKES HER ESCAPE! SEE THE ENTIRE ANIMATION IN THE FINAL GAME!



BY LINDSEY LAYNE KING

REVIEWS

Monkeys are rolling once again, and this time there's a new female cast member in the mix! Turn the page to read our full review of Super Monkey Ball: Banana Rumble!

A New Girl Joins the Gang

SUPER MONKEY BALL: BANANA RUMBLE

IT'S BEEN A rough decade or so for fans of Sega's beloved Super Monkey Ball franchise.

After a steady stream of releases throughout the '00s, things dried up after a string of lesser-received, more gimmicky games, with the last one for years coming in 2014 on iOS: Super Monkey Ball Bounce. And that wasn't even an SMB entry in the traditional sense, but more of a Peggle-like game that has nevertheless since been delisted.

Despite this, fans' affinity for the series never really went away. Five years later, Sega responded with an updated version of the motion-based Wii release, Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz. Though this wasn't one of the more beloved entries from the series' heyday, Sega came at it with a carrot-and-stick approach – or maybe that should be "banana and stick." Nevertheless again, the gauntlet was laid down, with the idea put forth that if *that* game did well, then *maybe* they would make more.

Apparently, it did well enough. Two years later, we got Super Monkey Ball: Banana Mania, which remade the series' first three entries. And as great as that was (though not quite perfect, as some of the more hardcore SMB purists might attest), there was still the desire for something actually new and fresh. Not just another remake!

Now, we see the "buy this remake/collection/re-release and we *might* make something new" idea thrown around a fair bit in the biz. Sometimes it pans out. Sometimes it doesn't.

This time, it panned out!

Sega and Ryu Ga Gotoku Studio just released the first truly all-new entry in the Super Monkey Ball series in almost

a decade (more if you exclude Bounce), Super Monkey Ball: Banana Rumble.

In a way, this is Super Monkey Ball taken back to its roots. No bosses, no jump button, no motion control gimmicks – just pure monkey-rolling fun as you maneuver your sphere-encased simians through obstacle courses filled with pits, ramps, springs, switches, boost pads, conveyor belts and, of course, bananas.

That isn't to say there's nothing new here, however. In a case of "less is more" and "wow, this seems so obvious in hindsight," a new move has been added to AiAi and friends' arsenal: the Spin Dash! Acting very similar to its seeming namesake (which you'd expect it to be, given that Sonic and some of his friends are bonus characters again), you simply hold a button to charge up, then release to gain a turbo boost of speed in the direction you're pressing. But unlike Sonic's Spin Dash, you can charge this one while moving! There is a cooldown timer on it between uses, though, so you can't just spam the Spin Dash to zip everywhere.

Even so, much like in Sonic 2, this simple addition opens up a number of possibilities, as it allows you to essentially try to break the game in crazy ways to reach the end of each course in record time. Of course, doing that means you're bound to miss out on lots of bananas, which you'll need to collect throughout each course in order to fulfill certain missions and purchase new goods from the in-game shop. Suffice it to say that these missions and going for the best time lend a fair degree of replayability to each level, as do the different heroes.

Indeed, AiAi, GonGon and the rest are back, and sporting a new series of fashions, which helps freshen up the characters' designs while still feeling suitable to their personalities. And if you're not a fan of their default looks, you can select alternate color schemes or buy all-new outfits for them as well. There's even a bonus Shinobi costume for joining the SMB:BR mailing list! More Sega-themed costumes are coming as DLC in September, too.

Of course, if you want to take a break from all the monkey shines without stopping the game, there are separately purchasable characters via the Sega Pass: Sonic, Tails, Knuckles, Amy, Axel from Crazy Taxi and Beat from Jet Set Radio can all be brought into the mix. Unfortunately, they don't get to wear the costumes purchased for the main cast, so no Shinobi Knuckles this time.

Back to the core of the game, there are two main types of gameplay: Adventure and Battle, and each is available for single-player fun, as well as local and online multiplayer, featuring a different number of local players available. Adventure even features a co-op mode, in which two players work together to get all the bananas and reach the goal.

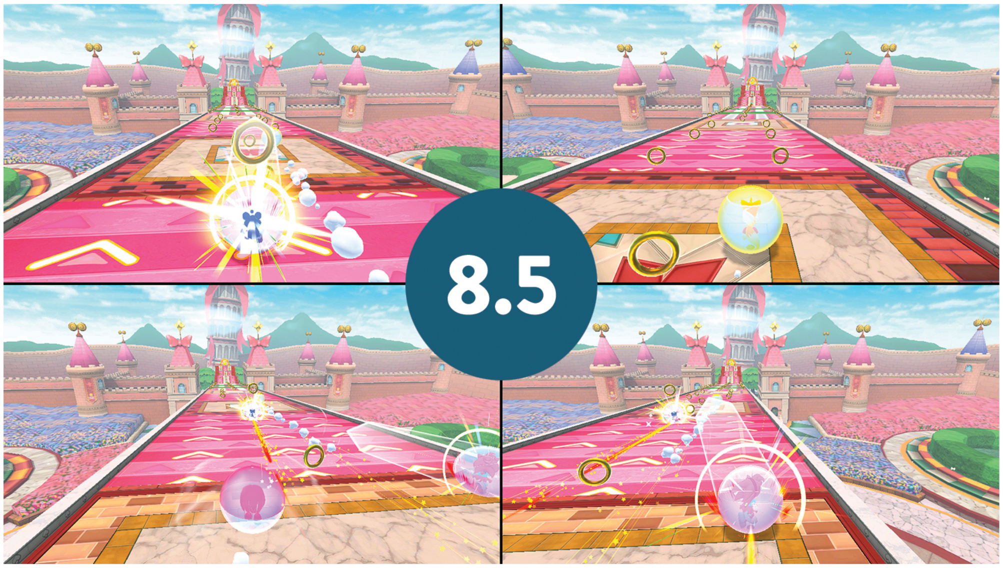
The Adventure mode also introduces a new Super Monkey Ball story – and this time, they didn't spare any expense! The cutscenes before and after each world are now fully animated. Here, we meet the newest member of the SMB crew, Palette – a young girl who's searching for her missing father. She thinks that finding the Legendary Banana is the key to finding him, and so she befriends the others and teaches them the Spin Dash technique to help her in her quest. Always up for a new adventure, the rest of the gang obliges.

Along the way, some other new characters, including the Gala Family of thieves, join in the fun. And they're obtainable as playable characters, too.

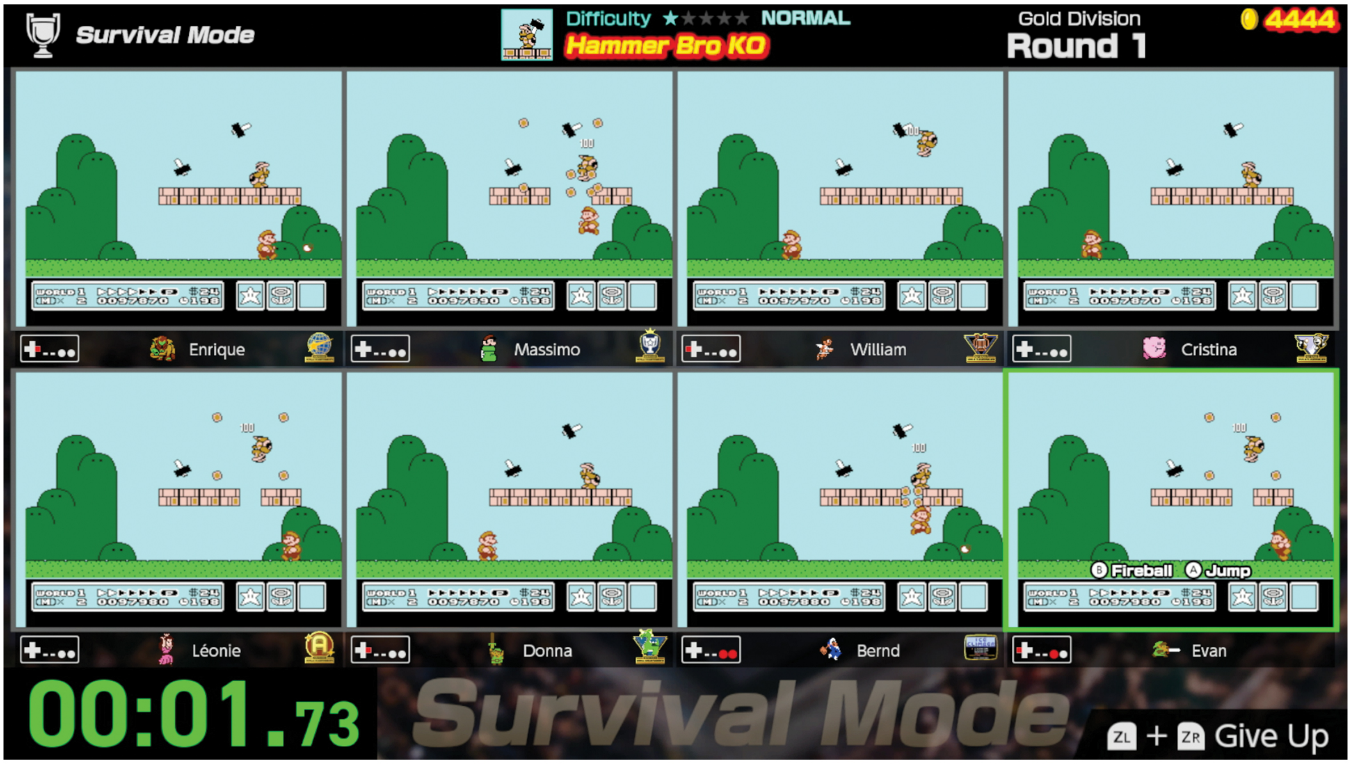
That said, the cutscenes add an enjoyable charm to the proceedings, but for all intents and purposes are inessential to the core gameplay. I found them to be a lighthearted, fun little story with a bit of warmth to it that I enjoyed seeing play out as the adventure continued.

Battle mode can host up to 16 players – or one player and up to 15 CPU opponents. Rules range from Race (reach the goal first) to Banana Hunt (get the most bananas within the time limit), Ba-BOOM! (Hot Potato with bombs for five rounds), Goal Rush (roll through marked goals to get the most points) and Robot Smash (get the most points by smashing and destroying robots), and can be contested across a different number stages each. Personally, I enjoyed the latter three the most. And even nearly two months after release, I had little difficulty finding a full lobby to join with, and had no connection problems whatsoever as I played.

Super Monkey Ball: Banana Rumble was a long time coming. But maybe it was just worth waiting for! **– DAVID**



SWITCH PUBLISHER: SEGA DEVELOPER: RYU GA GOTOKU RATING: E



Another 8-Bit Encore

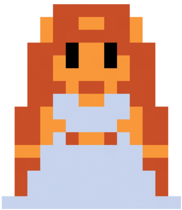
NINTENDO WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS: NES EDITION

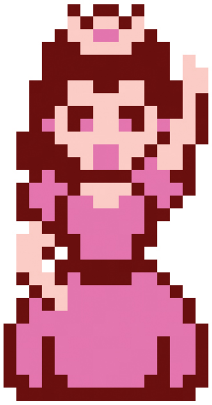
FOR KIDS WHO were playing NES games in the late '80s/early '90s, the Nintendo World Championships were the stuff of legend. Between the movie The Wizard and the general fervor toward all things Nintendo back then, the idea of a huge tournament where kids could compete for video game supremacy on a national stage was truly awe-inspiring. Fast-forward 30 or so years, and we have Nintendo's first official retail release bearing the classic NWC branding – and while it certainly gets a lot right, it's far from the dream come true that longtime fans may have been wishing for.

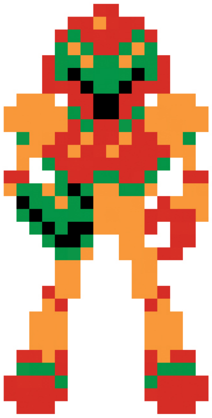
Nintendo World Championships: NES Edition has a lot in common with the NES Remix games for Wii U and 3DS. There's a selection of NES titles, and it's up to the player to complete a number of bite-sized challenges in each one, like grabbing the first Super Mushroom in Super Mario Bros., or climbing up one floor in Ice Climber.

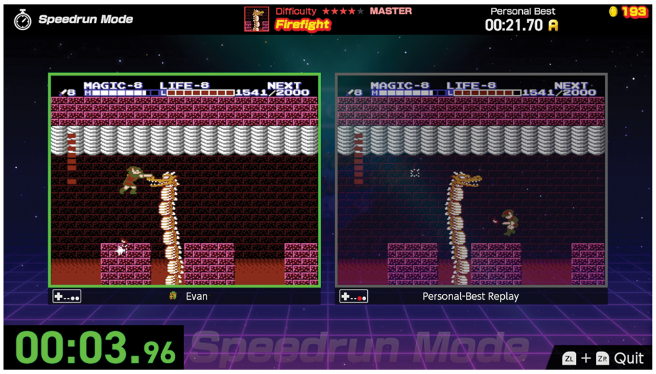
The goal is to finish these tasks in the shortest time possible, with the game awarding various rankings to players with quick fingers in a number of game modes. The primary single player "campaign" is called Speedrun Mode, where you can access any of the game's 150+ challenges as often as you like, honing your skills to chase after a coveted S rank – or just beat your own personal times to your heart's content. Then there's Survival Mode, where you compete against ghost data from random players around the world in a set of three pre-determined challenges that shuffle every week, as well as the unlockable Legendary Trial where you have to try your hand at completing every challenge with a Legendary difficulty level in a row as quickly as you can.

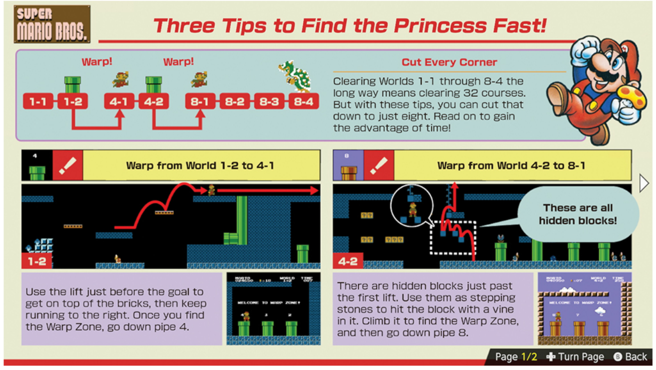
The main event, though, is the titular World Championships. Similar to Survival Mode, it changes on a











weekly basis, but instead of competing against ghost data, you just have to try your best to achieve the fastest time in a set of five challenges. You can replay them as many times as you want, and your fastest times at the end of the week will be entered into the tournament. Once it's over, you can see your worldwide ranking, as well as replays of the fastest play-through from each game's winning run.

The overall presentation is pretty great. There are a number of "Classified Information" hint screens that are designed to look like old Nintendo Power pages, you get to choose what your favorite NES game is from a list of literally every single officially licensed NES game ever made (including third-party stuff!), and there's a ton of cool unlockable pins and icons to personalize your online profile with. It's all wrapped up in a gloriously '90s-inspired tournament theme, complete with spotlights, gridlines and even "live" crowd cheers while playing.

On paper, this all sounds great. And in practice, it can indeed be fun. I've played in every World Championships and Survival Mode since the game's launch, and I've S-ranked all of the challenges in Speedrun Mode, which, according to my Switch's in-game clock, took me about 10 hours. But unfortunately, I'm not sure how much more time I plan on putting into it.

The biggest problem with the World Championships, as of this writing, is cheating. In the second week, the winning Donkey Kong player utilized a glitch to get the high score. Naturally, glitches are a big part of the speedrunning community, but this game goes out of its way to penalize using glitches, and even certain shortcuts, during regular play — so when something like that gets overlooked, it can make things feel pretty unfair, and clearly defeats the spirit of the event. Worse, players have clearly been using tool assistance! Most obviously in a Zelda II challenge where the winning time executed multiple frame-perfect inputs, a feat that is extremely improbable to have been performed by a real human.

The game selection also leaves a lot to be desired. There are a total of 13 games to choose from, all of which are first-party titles. (That's three fewer games than the first NES Remix had). The lack of third-party titles is understandable, but is still disappointing, considering the original Nintendo World Championships from 1990 featured Rad Racer and Tetris, both of which are absent from this release.

But even a surprising number of Nintendo's own games are missing! Dr. Mario, Pinball, Wrecking Crew and even Punch-Out!!, a game that people have been speedrunning for decades, are all conspicuously absent.

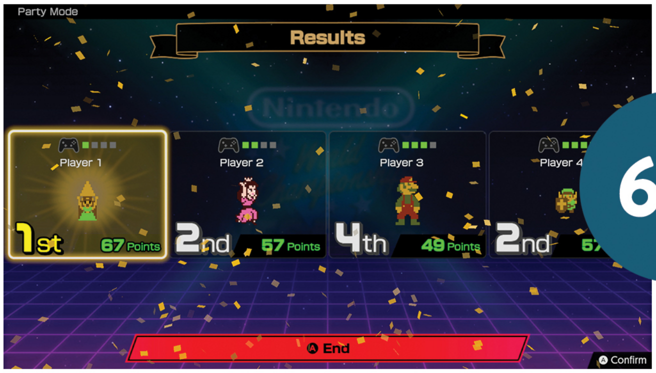
Multiplayer is a bit of a mixed bag as well. The game supports eight-player local multiplayer, but that's it. There's no direct online play, no local wireless, no friends-only leaderboards. Nothing. And while the idea of a local party mode is great, it comes with its own set of issues, foremost being the lack of any sort of difficulty accommodations. Where Mario Kart has Blue Shells, or Mario Party has handicap options, there's nothing like that at all here, so unless all players have a similar skill level, matches become un-fun very quickly.

There's also a level of familiarity necessary to even understand these challenges. When I had my friends over, several of them had never played many of these games before, so actions like correctly landing a bike in Excitebike or defeating enemies in Balloon Fight were completely lost on them. While there are occasional on-screen prompts to point players in the right direction, there are no basic instructions for beginners.

Things get even harder with more players, too. Single Joy-Con play is extremely difficult, with games like Metroid requiring button combinations for simple actions like equipping missiles, and the playfields becoming more and more cramped the more players join in. There's no running tally of wins, either. Each session is completely self-contained, so if you plan on playing several matches in a row, you'll have to keep track of how many points you have on your own.

There's a lot to like here if you're a longtime NES fan. The physical edition's goodies are a nice addition. But it's hard to look at this game and not lament how much more it could have been. It's possible we'll see some of these issues corrected in updates. Still, this concept seems like it would have been better served as a feature for Nintendo Switch Online instead of its own separate release, taking advantage of that service's existing library rather than being limited to just 13 titles. There's a solid foundation in place here, and with effort, this could become an interesting franchise. But if you aren't already an NES fan, you should skip this one. — **KRIS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO & INDIESZERO RATING: E



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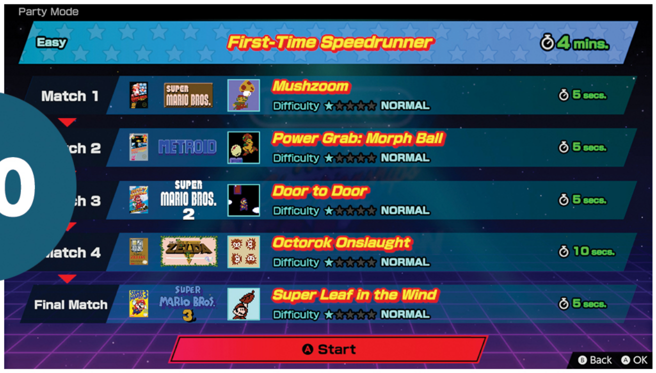


SWITCH PUBLISHER: BANDAI NAMCO
DEVELOPER: INDIESZERO
RATING: CERO A

Retro Game Challenge Revived

GAME CENTER CX: ARINO NO CHOUSENJOU 1+2 REPLAY

WHEN THE NEW Nintendo World Championships: NES Edition was first revealed, many guessed it would work as a follow-up to the beloved NES Remix games on Wii U and 3DS. Now that we've reviewed the game, we know that it's more of its own thing (for better or worse). But if you're still hankering for a game like NES Remix – from the same developers no less – Game Center CX: Arino no Chousenjou 1+2 Replay has you covered. Just be ready to boot up a few online walk-throughs, because the games here are almost entirely in Japanese, which can make progress nearly impossible without a guide and/or a translation.

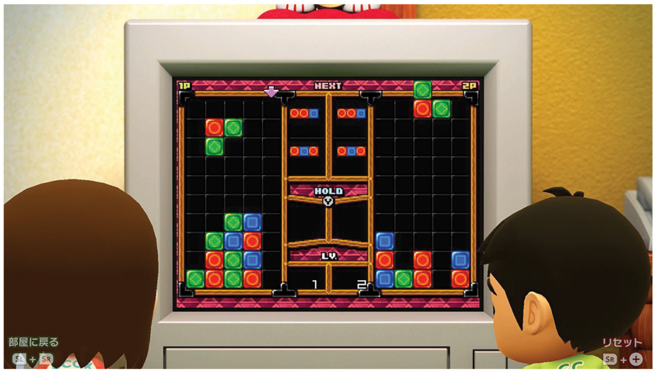
The first two titles in the Game Center CX series, first released on the DS in the late '00s, were also an influence on Digital Eclipse's Gold Master series (Atari 50, The Making of Karateka, et cetera). But, instead of creating a playable timeline of real-life gaming history, Game Center CX 1+2 Replay contains all-original titles that work as tributes and parodies of classics from the mid-to-late '80s.

Completing four challenges in a game unlocks the next game in your growing library. You also nab game manuals and magazines to peruse for tips and tricks along the way. Pretty much every genre of the NES era, from shmups to platformers, driving games to Pac-Man-like maze games, and even a text-based adventure (complete with floppy disc loading sounds) makes an appearance here. In Japan, the main selling point of these collections is their connection to the Game Center CX TV show, a long-standing series that essentially started the ubiquitous Let's Play trend that dominates the streaming space today. But you absolutely don't need to know the show to enjoy these games. They're (almost) all fantastic in their own right.

Game Center CX 1, which was localized in English under the name Retro Game Challenge back in 2009, offers a smattering of smaller and simpler software samples than its sequel. Only the last two titles in its timeline, a Persona-meets-Dragon Quest-style RPG called Guadia Quest and a stage-based action/adventure title called Haggleman 3, are truly spread out and sprawling. The first two Haggleman games, and the rest of the virtual cartridges you collect beforehand, are in a more arcade-y vein, providing necessary context for understanding the evolution of 8-bit gaming in general. Unless you've ever endulged in a minimalist single-screen shooter like Cosmic Gate, you won't truly get how impressive the later titles, like the screen-scrolling shmup Star Prince and the aforementioned Haggleman 3, truly are.

While that inaugural title did a great job of introducing the overall concept of the series, Game Center CX 2 outdid it in almost every way. The only thing it's missing from CX 1 is approximations of Haggleman 2 and 3. Other than that, every title from the first collection is represented here in one way or another, while being joined by a host of all-new (but still pretending to be old) games. Some, like Muteki-Ken Kung Fu, look better than 90% of indie games released today!

In fact, pretty much all the new games here would score an 8, 9 or 10 if released as standalone, $5-$10 eShop titles on Switch. Triotos (a puzzle game that comes in both Game Boy- and SNES-flavored presentations), Gun Duel (a two-player shmup with transformable ships), Demon Returns (an NES-style cross between Super Mario Bros. and Ghouls & Ghosts) and Super Demon Returns (its SNES-style sequel with four-button controls and advanced, 16-bit graphics) are the big standouts. And once you look up what the challenges



9.0

are for each, you won't need much in the way of online help. But for other titles, like the text adventures and RPGs, you'll need to follow those guides step by step, and even then it can be pretty confusing.

For someone like me who grew up playing games in Japanese with a friend from another country (a topic I was lucky enough to talk about in more depth and detail in NES Endings Compendium: Volume 2, the new book from NF Publishing!), there's a decidedly retro feel to having to crack open Gamefaqs on my computer alongside my console in order to get through it all. But for the average person? It's just a drag.

All-new in this collection are online leaderboards for a handful of titles (Cosmic Gate, Rally King, Star Prince, Wiz-Man, Gun Duel, Triotos and Kugure! Girijan MAX), standalone two-player versions of Triotos and Gun Duel and, most importantly, an all-new single-player beat-'em-up called Flame Fighting Salaryman Yattaro. It looks and sounds like a cross between Mega Man 2 and River City Ransom, but under those surface references it's a wealth of originality. Neither a robot nor a ruffian, Yattaro is a clean-cut employee of a game publisher who's tasked by his boss to beat up rival developers (as well as random people on the street) in order to seize their computer chips. And in a fresh, genre-defying addition, Yattaro can grab enemies and initiate a dance-like mini-game to trade business cards with them. If you peacefully resolve every fight using this technique, you'll get a special Pacifist Run ending (which is one of 10 different endings in all). That's just one reason why Flame Fighting Salaryman Yattaro is one of my favorite games of the year.

It pains me that Yattaro and the rest of this package will likely never officially land outside Japan. Even those who import it will miss out on its many jokes, and the joy of reading its in-game magazines, unless they understand the language. If there were any chance that this collection would see localization, I'd recommend that you wait on picking it up. But the rights are so messy, there's almost no way it's ever coming here legally. While there's sure to be a fan translation someday, shipping an official cart overseas and using walkthroughs is the only way to play it any time soon.

And in a way, looking up online guides isn't that different than leafing through the enthusiast-written magazine you're holding in your hands right now! That's why I feel confident in recommending this collection to you, dear reader. It's a perfect fit for Nintendo history buffs and old-school fans everywhere! **— JONATHAN**

The Dark Moon Rises Again

LUIGI'S MANSION 2 HD

I'VE DECIDED THAT Luigi's Mansion is one of my favorite Nintendo series.

I hadn't ever had that thought before playing this latest entry. And I'm not sure why! I've always adored these adventures, making sure to play each one at its launch – the original in late 2001, in my brand-new purple GameCube; Luigi's Mansion 3 around five years ago when it went on sale on Halloween; and the original version of this new release, back when it first appeared on the 3DS in early 2013, where it was called Luigi's Mansion: Dark Moon. I wrote one of NF's earliest reviews to praise that game, awarding it a 9.5 rating (making it the first title in the history of our then-young magazine to score so highly!). But, all the while, the neurons never quite connected in my brain to make me realize, "Hey. You know, I really love this little franchise."

Well, now they finally have.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO, NEXT LEVEL GAMES & TANTALUS RATING: E

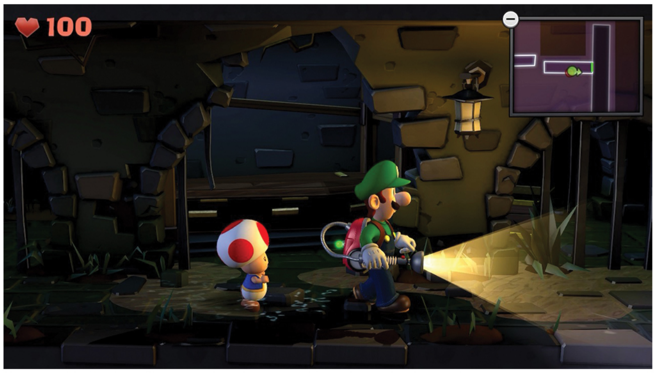
Nintendo has come a long way in recent years in giving their characters more, well, *character* – having them emote more clearly, express genuine feelings in cutscenes and convey their personalities both during those hands-off moments as well as in active action. But Mario and Link and every Splatoon mascot they've ever dreamt up are all still playing second fiddle to Luigi in this regard. He is *so* playful and expressive and honestly funny in these Mansion games that it really feels like you've taken control of a living cartoon when you play them.

I remember offering similar praise for Luigi's Mansion 3 half a decade ago, but it's worth echoing here because that same level of animated emotion is on constant display in this prequel – and you'll be able to appreciate it so much more now that it's not all locked down to the old, low-res, three-inch 3DS screen.

The game did look good back in 2013! I'm not knocking the technical achievements of the original dev team at all. In fact, it's largely due to the diligence of those original devs that this HD glow-up is able to look as gorgeous as it does! That first team at Next Level over a decade ago packed each scene in this game so full of depth and detail – filling the rooms of these mansions with extra objects and decorations far beyond what was necessary – that now, when these same scenes are showcased in high definition, it reaches a level of visual brilliance that very nearly matches Mansion 3, which was developed specifically for the Switch. That was quite prescient and forward-thinking of them!

The new dev team of porting professionals at Tantalus, though, deserve their own round of praise, because they applied a great new coat of paint to these environments and characters. Only once or twice through my entire run back through the campaign did I notice older, lower-resolution texture assets still in use from the 3DS original. Nearly everything has been retouched, and you notice it instantly in places like the great denim texture on Luigi's overalls.

Continuing the visual evaluation – since that is primarily the point of "HD" re-releases like these – I will note that I do have one complaint about the way things look: The viewpoint of some rooms is more difficult to parse in this new version. On the 3DS, the system offered stereoscopic visuals – a.k.a. "glasses-free 3D" – and Luigi's Mansion: Dark Moon was a stunning showcase of that technology, since the interior spaces that Luigi explores in this game all visually popped with an incredible sense of depth. Really object-heavy, crowded spaces like the greenhouse room in the Haunted Towers were amazing to see on the small screen, as the 3D effect really helped you understand how far back into the room or forward toward the screen Luigi was standing, relative to all the surrounding pots and plants. On the Switch, though? That 3D effect is gone, so those low-viewing-angle rooms have become kind of troublesome to deal with. It's not as easy to tell where Luigi's standing in the environment any more.



In sequences of slow exploration, it's not much of a problem. But in fast action scenes or frantic combat, the lack of the old visual depth does make this version a little tougher to play.

This game's portable origins also make themselves apparent through its segmented structure, as you're never really allowed to fully explore any of the game's environments at your leisure. Everything is mission-based, so you've always got a target to track down or a specific puzzle to solve, and Professor E. Gadd will sometimes buzz in to direct you away from entering certain rooms if they aren't on the critical path for the current quest. Exploration is still somewhat encouraged and rewarded with secrets like dozens of hidden gemstones that often are placed in out-of-the-way, currently unimportant places, so the game's sometimes at odds with itself in that regard. But more than once I wished I could choose to end a mission when I wanted to, and not when the gibberish-spouting Professor decided for me that I'd had enough fun.

Beyond its missing 3D pizzazz and restrictive mission structure, though, everything else about Luigi's Mansion 2 HD is amazing. It's a blast to embody Luigi and all of his cowardly energy. His fear is funny! He never really gains true courage and never gets used to the paranormal activity swirling around him. He is always shocked; always surprised. And that's hilarious and heart-warming. You always want to root for this guy, even after the 237th time he shrieks in fright from seeing a ghost.

And the core gameplay remains as solid as ever, pairing together slow, patient puzzle solving as you walk through each environment with hectic ghostbusting battles in which you have to freeze silly specters with your flashlight and then suck them up into your vacuum cleaner backpack in a game of tug-of-war. There's even a solid multiplayer mode that's worth checking out.

Again, my appreciation for this series has grown only slowly, but this port – even with its handful of flaws – has cemented my love for the brand overall. Give it a shot yourself! Maybe you'll feel the same way! **— LUCAS**

9.0

The Series Blazes a New Trail

THE LEGEND OF HEROES: TRAILS THROUGH DAYBREAK

TO KEEP A series going for 20 years takes a careful balance between two things: a tried-and-true formula that works, and enough innovation from game to game to keep the experience fresh, engaging and relevant. Nihon Falcom's Trails franchise celebrated its 20th anniversary this year. Its latest localized installment, Trails through Daybreak, provides the best example of this balance and proves why this series is still standing the test of time – despite not being as well-known as some of its JRPG contemporaries.

Trails through Daybreak is the 11th game in this long-running and interconnected RPG series. It initially released in 2021 in Japan, and then worldwide this year. To give a quick primer, the Trails games all connect to each other, but within the series are several sub-series that feature unique protagonists, storylines and regions in its overall universe.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NIS AMERICA
DEVELOPER: NIHON FALCOM
RATING: T

Daybreak serves as the start of a new story, so if you've never played the Trails games, you can begin here. It has plenty for both old and new fans to enjoy, and adds refreshing twists to its characters, combat and storylines.

Let's start with protagonist Van Arkride. He's older and more morally gray than most of the Trails leads so far. Van, 24, works as a "Spriggan" (a.k.a. a fixer), who helps people with issues that they'd rather not take to the police or the Bracer Guild (an organization in the series that's tasked with protecting and aiding civilians). While he may skirt the law, occasionally help shady individuals and provide a more mature perspective, Van has an extreme love of sweets and cars, which leads to many funny and relatable moments.

He's also pretty selfless, for better or worse.

After aiding high schooler Agnès Claudel with a job involving her grandfather's journals, Van continues to help her free of charge. This sets the main story events in motion within Daybreak's setting of the Calvard Republic: a diverse, democratic country. While playing, I found a lot of parallels between it and the U.S.

Van and Agnès commence a search for the Oct-Geneses: eight prototype devices that her grandfather constructed and that must be gathered together to prevent impending disaster. Their mission leads them to meet a charming cast of characters.

I came away loving most of the cast from Daybreak, and was impressed by its English dub. It's unfortunate that so many lines aren't voiced, because when they are, it's truly a treat.

I think Van and Elaine Auclair, his ex-girlfriend and A-Rank Bracer, are the strongest in terms of characterization and performance. These two could provide the best romance this series has had to date, too! Elaine's balance of strength, heartbreak and longing to help Van absolutely floored me. She has become my favorite Trails character, hands down.

Through its cast and story, Daybreak tackles some pretty sensitive and relevant subject matter, including racism, LGBTQ+ stigma, artificial intelligence, nuclear weapons and more. Trails has always highlighted political and social issues throughout its tenure, but Daybreak goes a step further with how well it handles these topics. It really feels like an RPG made for adults, and its English localization absolutely delivers in communicating these themes.

Another new feature Daybreak offers is a morality system within its sidequests. Your choices of which missions to take on and how to handle them will raise Van's Law, Gray or Chaos levels. Once those hit certain thresholds, you're awarded items and other perks. I liked the agency this system granted, and it made me feel more immersed.

Daybreak also puts a new spin on Trails' turn-based Action Time battle system, giving it a real-time component, adding in ally assists called SCLM

(Shard Circular Linked Metafield) and Shard Skills.

The AT system involves manipulating turn order to gain advantages, and using Crafts and Arts: character-specific moves and customizable elemental attacks, respectively.

Daybreak's hybrid system also allows players to utilize real-time action combat, which includes basic attacks, charged attacks and dodges. You can use this system to hack through weak enemies and set up advantages against stronger enemies. Once a foe is stunned by your real-time attacks in the field, you can activate turn-based mode, then gain several buffs and deal additional damage, making these battles easier and faster.

Shards add another layer to customization. In past games, equipping elemental items called Quartz provided Arts, but now they can also produce Shard Skills if you combine certain elements together. Some skills include adding elemental damage to attacks and a counterattack ability.

While I'd love to see more complexity in the action combat, this system felt satisfying throughout my playthrough and made exploring environments less of a chore.

With all of its positives, Daybreak has lingering issues from past Trails games, including some unnecessary tropes and rough Switch performance.

I wasn't a huge fan of how Falcom handled Daybreak's main heroine, Agnès. She starts out as a determined young woman, but after a week of knowing Van, she develops a crush on him, and that then becomes a major focus of her character.

Not only is it uncomfortable because she's eight years younger than Van, but she becomes pretty clingy. I think her character would have shined brighter without the "schoolgirl crush" trope thrown in.

She's also sexualized often. I'm just done with scenes that discuss a minor's chest size at this point. Falcom can do better, and Agnès deserves better.

Daybreak's Switch performance also misses the mark. Visuals look fine up close, but whenever scenes zoom out, characters and environments become out of focus. The port really needs more anti-aliasing.

Compared to the PlayStation 4 and 5 versions, which I've also played, the loading times are longer, and frame drops are more frequent on Switch. The Switch port isn't unplayable by any means, but the game performs better overall on other platforms.

These shortcomings don't take too much away from the incredible RPG experience Daybreak provides. It takes the Trails' series biggest strengths and applies modern and thoughtful additions to them, making their potential fully realized.

From the way it handles sensitive topics to the excellent cast and refined combat system, I can't wait to see how Falcom builds upon this formula in the future!

And we won't have to wait too long, as NIS America has confirmed that their localization of Trails through Daybreak II will ship for all systems early next year. We'll preview that one in our next issue! **— MAGGIE**

9.5

Reunificiation Project

HARVEST MOON: THE WINDS OF ANTHOS

EXPLORE A GIGANTIC world and discover clues to solve the mystery of what happened to the Harvest Goddess so many years ago!

It's been a long time since I've played a Harvest Moon game. I've played plenty of the Story of Seasons series' sequels and a giant list of cozy games, but the older Harvest Moon brand hasn't caught my interest for a while. Harvest Moon: The Winds of Anthos looked like a very cute game with lots of characters to befriend and a whole world to explore. This game was first released on the Nintendo Switch last September, but I finally got my hands on it to experience what the world of Anthos has to offer.

Harvest Moon has an interesting history, as the Harvest Moon games of today aren't affiliated with the ones made in the past. The old Harvest Moons were actually made by the company Marvelous, with Natsume translating and publishing them in English. The two companies split back in 2014 right after the release of Harvest Moon 3D: A New Beginning on the 3DS. Natsume kept the rights for the Harvest Moon name, so Marvelous had to change the title of their games to Story of Seasons. While Marvelous continued to grow and evolve their games, Natsume's attempts to keep up felt more like cash grabs than actual passion projects.

The story of The Winds of Anthos begins with an erupting volcano and the Harvest Goddess protecting the land from disaster. Years pass and your character wakes up in a small village that was walled off from the rest of the world. No one in the village seems too worried about it, except for the occasional comment about missing their lost family members. You break out of the village after about a week of in-game time. The player's job is to help rebuild and reconnect the villages of Anthos while also discovering what happened to the Harvest Goddess and Harvest Sprites!

The Winds of Anthos feels different from the past games created by Natsume – this one feels less like a cash grab, and more like Natsume really tried to make a new, innovative farming and exploration experience. The art style is adorable, and the world feels very colorful while also being relaxing. You can craft, complete quests and marry up to 10 bachelors and bachelorettes. (Or 12 if you buy the DLC.) The villagers also provide quests that will help them to open new shops and buildings. This provides more depth to a lot of the characters, as you want to help them with their goals. The game also has a variety of wild animals that can be tamed to become livestock or pets, such as birds, horses, sheep, bears and jaguars!

Another big step for Natsume is that this is their first game to allow same-sex relationships. While other companies did this way before them, it's nice that Natsume finally took that step forward for their audience.

Although this is the best Harvest Moon Natsume has put out in ages, there are still issues that need to be addressed. The game's tutorial takes up to an hour to complete – that can feel very tedious for farming game veterans who don't need to be taught how to water a crop. The developers also simplified farming completely: You don't need to worry about what can and can't grow in which season, and everything's done automatically with the press of a button. There's no need to switch tools in your inventory or to get out seeds. The game does it all for you when you approach a tree, rock or field. This can be good for a novice audience, but as an experienced gamer the gameplay leaves a lot to be desired.

The Winds of Anthos is a pleasant game with a big world to explore. There are many improvements from Natsume's past work, but its simplified gameplay made it feel as if the game were holding my hand throughout the whole experience. That's not entirely a bad thing, as some people enjoy a more linear experience.

Overall, I had a relaxing time with the game, as I could turn my mind off for a while. I can only hope that Natsume will continue to improve their games in the future. – **EMMA**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NATSUME RATING: E

7.0

ARCHIVE

The complete list of Nintendo Force retail reviews from the last two years. Scores reflect individual reviewers' opinions.

SWITCH

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
Ace Angler: Fishing Spirits	6.5	Rebecca	#63
Advance Wars 1+2: Re-Boot Camp	9.5	Lucas	#65
AEW: Fight Forever	7.0	David	#67
AI: The Somnium Files – nirvanA Initiative	8.0	Tony	#62
Another Code: Recollection	8.0	J.-Charles	#70
Another Crab's Treasure	8.5	Lucas	#72
Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney Trilogy	8.5	Rebecca	#70
Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration	9.5	Kris	#64
Atelier Ryza 3: Alchemist of the End & The Secret Key	9.0	Thor	#67
Baten Kaitos I & II HD Remaster	8.0	Lucas	#68
Bayonetta 3	9.0	Jonathan	#63
Bayonetta Origins: Cereza and the Lost Demon	8.0	Jonathan	#65
Bluey: The Videogame	7.0	Lucas	#70
Bugsnax	8.5	Lucas	#61
Capcom Fighting Collection	9.0	Jonathan	#61
ConnecTank	7.5	Lucas	#67
Demon Slayer -Kimetsu no Yaiba- Sweep the Board!	6.5	Emma	#72
Detective Pikachu Returns	6.0	Lucas	#68
Digimon Survive	8.0	Maggie	#63
Disney Illusion Island	6.5	J.-Charles	#68
DNF Duel	8.0	Sean	#66
Double Dragon Gaiden: Rise of the Dragons	8.0	Kris	#67
Dragon Quest Monsters: The Dark Prince	9.0	Lucas	#72
Dragon Quest Treasures	8.0	Matthew T.	#64
El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron HD Remaster	8.5	Jonathan	#72
Endless Ocean: Luminous	5.0	Lucas	#72
Everybody 1-2-Switch!	7.5	Kris	#67
Fashion Dreamer	7.0	Rebecca	#69
Fire Emblem Engage	8.5	Rebecca	#64
Fire Emblem Warriors: Three Hopes	8.0	Rebecca	#61
Harvestella	8.0	Nadia	#63
Hot Wheels Unleashed 2: Turbocharged	8.5	Lucas	#72
Infinity Strash: Dragon Quest – The Adventure of Dai	5.0	Lucas	#68
Jack Jeanne	10	Maggie	#72
JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: All-Star Battle R	6.5	Tony	#62
Kirby's Return to Dream Land Deluxe	9.0	Lucas	#65
LIVE A LIVE	8.5	Rebecca	#61
Loop8: Summer of Gods	6.0	Maggie	#66
Mario + Rabbids Sparks of Hope	9.0	Lucas	#63
Mario vs. Donkey Kong	7.5	Lucas	#70
Master Detective Archives: Rain Code	7.0	Matthew T.	#67
Mega Man Battle Network Legacy Collection	8.0	David	#65
Metal Gear Solid Master Collection Vol. 1	8.5	Kris	#71
Metroid Prime Remastered	10	Lucas	#64
Nickelodeon Kart Racers 3: Slime Speedway	8.0	David	#63
Octopath Traveler II	8.5	Rebecca	#65
Otogi Katsugeki Mameda no Bakeru: Oracle Saitorou no Sainan!!	9.0	Lucas	#71
Pac-Man World Re-Pac	7.5	Lucas	#62
Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door	10	Lucas	#72
Persona 3 Portable	9.0	Maggie	#70
Persona 5 Tactica	9.0	Lucas	#71
Pikmin 4	10	Lucas	#67
Pocky & Rocky Reshrined	8.5	Lucas	#69
Pokémon Scarlet	8.5	Lucas	#63
Pokémon Violet	8.5	Lucas	#63
Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown	9.0	Derrick	#70
Princess Peach: Showtime!	7.5	Kris	#71
Puzzle Bobble Everybubble!	8.0	Jonathan	#67
Rain on Your Parade	8.0	Lucas	#65
Rune Factory 3 Special	7.5	Rebecca	#68
Samba de Amigo: Party Central	7.0	J.-Charles	#69
Sea of Stars	9.5	Kris	#68
Shiren the Wanderer: The Mystery Dungeon of Serpentcoil Island	8.5	Lucas	#71
Shiren the Wanderer: The Tower of Fortune and the Dice of Fate	8.5	Lucas	#69
Silent Hope	8.0	Brett	#69
Sonic Frontiers	7.0	Tony	#64
Sonic Origins Plus	8.0	Tony	#67
Sonic Superstars	8.5	Lucas	#69
Splatoon 3	9.0	Lucas	#62
Star Ocean: The Second Story R	7.0	Maggie	#69
Story of Seasons: A Wonderful Life	7.0	Rebecca	#67
Super Bomberman R 2	8.0	Lucas	#71
Super Mario Bros. Wonder	9.0	Lucas	#69
Super Mario RPG	9.5	Lucas	#69
Tactics Ogre: Reborn	8.5	Lucas	#71
Taiko no Tatsujin: Rhythm Festival	8.0	J.-Charles	#63
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Cowabunga Collection	9.0	David	#62
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Arcade: Wrath of the Mutants	6.5	David & Tony	#72
The Legend of Heroes: Trails from Zero	9.0	Maggie	#62
The Legend of Heroes: Trails into Reverie	10	Maggie	#67
The Legend of Heroes: Trails to Azure	10	Maggie	#65
The Legend of Nayuta: Boundless Trails	8.0	Maggie	#68
The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom	10	Lucas	#66
Theatrhythm Final Bar Line	9.0	J.-Charles	#65
Unicorn Overlord	9.0	J.-Charles	#71
WarioWare: Move It!	8.0	Rebecca	#69
We Love Katamari REROLL + Royal Reverie	9.5	Jonathan	#66
Wunderling DX	8.0	Lucas	#64
Xenoblade Chronicles 3	10	Maggie	#62

REVIEW REMINDER
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: LINK'S AWAKENING

ECHOES OF WISDOM will be going on sale almost exactly five years after this remake first established the toy-like art style it's also adopting. (Link's Awakening launched in September 2019.) That means it's also been almost exactly five years since our own Jonathan Holmes praised it profusely, giving this grand glow-up from the Game Boy credit for bringing him back into the Zelda family after Breath of the Wild's open world didn't click with him. He ultimately awarded it a wonderful 9.5 review score, and in his conclusion he hoped that "its sale success would lead to the development of more Zelda games in this style." Well, it took half a decade, but that wish was granted!

I also penned a Second Opinion in that same issue (NF #43), in which I recommended Link's Awakening as a good first Zelda game to use to introduce young players to the series. I still feel the same way now! **— LUCAS**

NF

COMMUNITY

TRAVELOGUE & EXPO REPORT

Our Long Drive to Long Island

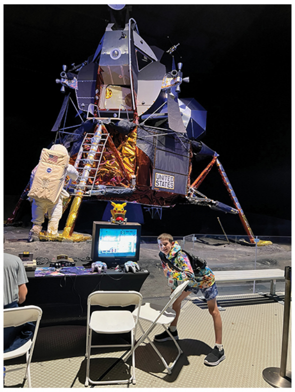
The Thomas family took our trusty minivan all the way to New York City to attend the Long Island Retro Gaming Expo!

I REGRET TO inform you that there are no Buc-ee's locations anywhere between Lexington, Kentucky, and New York City. And yet, we persisted! The Thomas family hit the road and added 1,500 more miles to our van's odometer to travel back and forth to the 2024 Long Island Retro Gaming Expo.

Joel Albino, the operations coordinator as well as an NF subscriber and backer for last year's Impact of Iwata Kickstarter, had reached out to me with an invitation to be a speaker at this year's event. I accepted on the condition that it was OK to bring the entire family along, and Joel agreed graciously to that request.

You may be familiar with these kinds of expos, in which gamers gather together for a few days to celebrate their shared favorite pastime, play a ton of decades-old games and browse the selections of dozens of vendors selling every kind of video game-related item imaginable. There may be one that happens near you!

But one cool thing that sets Long Island Retro Gaming Expo apart is its unique venue: The show is set up in the Cradle of Aviation Museum, so all of the vintage arcade machines and old gaming PCs are surrounded on all sides by over a century's worth of classic airplanes and spacecrafts. There's an F-14 in the parking lot!



You can see a piece of one of the Blue Angels' planes in our family photo on the left: It's suspended up above the main atrium, where most of the vendors are set up to sell their shirts, toys, books and all other categories of merch. (As well as plenty of old video games, of course.) The "Arcade Alley" was arranged on a walkway overlooking the entire east wing, featuring aircrafts and artifacts from the days of the Wright brothers through both World Wars and into the age of jet engines. A Pokémon area was set up in an outer space-themed room with a lunar lander on display. Chance, not yet 2 years old, sat in the cockpit of a fighter while Calvin, 10, competed in a Pokémon Stadium 2 minigame tournament 20 feet away. (He got second place!) The mix of retro video games and retro airplanes was a wild juxtaposition at every turn, and anyone who appreciates both of those worlds equally would be on cloud nine attending this expo.

The boys all had a blast, as you could've safely guessed. Chance is still too young to play video games, but he loved seeing all the planes – he just recently started getting really excited about airplanes, so it was a perfectly timed trip for him. Colson, 5, was in awe of so many of the old games that were made decades before he was born – his favorite ended up being Crystal Castles, a classic Atari cabinet. (Though he also retreated to the familiar comfort of TMNT: Shredder's Revenge several times throughout the weekend.) Cooper, 6, our Kirby-crazed kid, got his hands on Nightmare in Dream Land on a modded GBA that was outputting its video signal to a TV, and he parked himself there all day.

Calvin discovered a new passion for the Street Fighter series thanks to several fighting game cabinets being easily accessible, Carter kept his attention fixed on Mario games (as he often does) and even Mary enjoyed herself, snapping a selfie with a cosplayer who'd dressed up as her favorite princess, Daisy. (She was also a rockstar keeping up with all the boys and ferrying the younger three back and forth to the nearby children's museum for screen time breaks. She's NF's #1 leading lady!)

I think out of all of us, though, I must've had the most fun! I got to present a talk called "Remembering Satoru Iwata" that drew on the research and content of the Impact of Iwata book, and the room was packed with a fully appreciative audience who really connected with the heart of that great man.

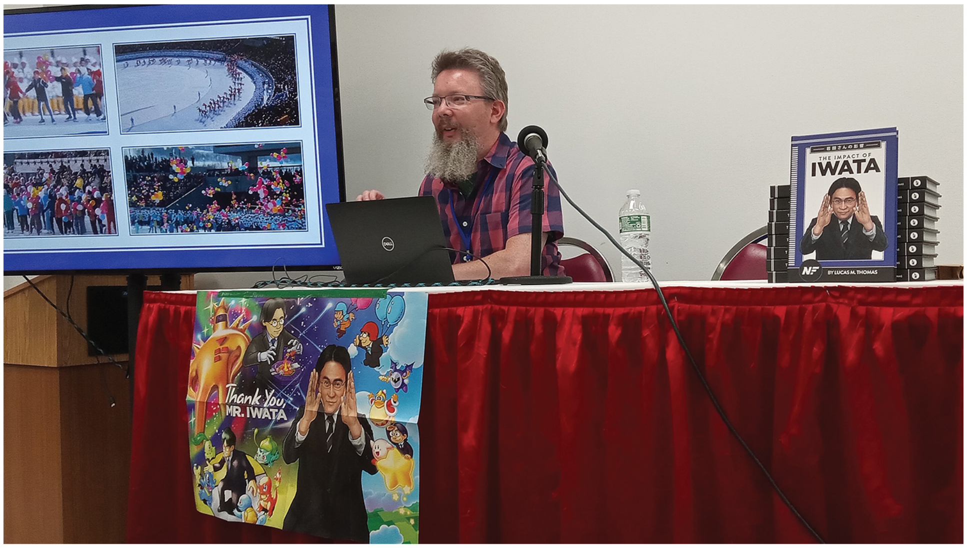
That presentation was the intent of my original invitation, but then I was also extended an extra opportunity: getting to interview Gail Tilden! Yes, Nintendo Force's Editor-in-Chief (that's me) got to sit down and chat with Nintendo Power's first Editor-in-Chief – the one who made that magazine a reality to begin with! It was an absolute honor. Even better, that interview took place in a massive planetarium, so I got to project images of old Nintendo Power issues over our heads at something like 40 feet tall as we talked. That was surreal!

Jeremy Parish joined us for that interview as well, contributing insightful questions and picking up the slack for me when I was too starstruck to organize my next thought. It was our first time really working together, and that was another joy.

I also got to meet and shake hands with Frank Cifaldi in person for the first time, and the two of us chatted about everything from print media preservation to what Howard Phillips was really like behind the scenes at Nintendo in the '80s.

All together, it was a great event and one that was worth making such a long pilgrimage to attend. I'd recommend you go yourself next time, especially if it would be a shorter trip for you to get there than it was for us! But hey, we made the best of it – and also got to go to Nintendo's New York store for the first time too. More on that next time! **– LUCAS**

LIRetro.com



COOKBOOK REVIEW

Recipes from the Valley

Whip up the tastiest treats with The Official Stardew Valley Cookbook!

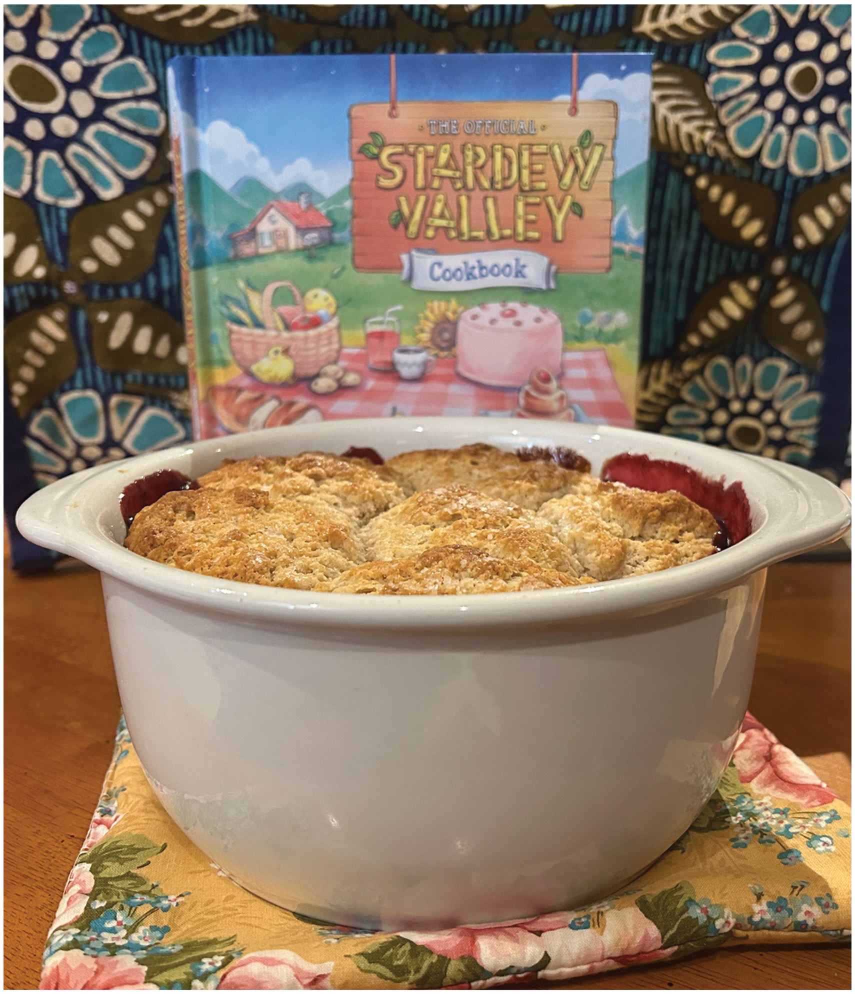
WALK INTO ANY mass market bookstore nowadays and you'll see a ton of cookbooks based on different media properties and video games gracing the shelves, from fan-inspired unofficial recipe collections to officially licensed cookbooks celebrating games like Street Fighter, Sonic the Hedgehog, Minecraft and Pokémon. It's been a few years, but now Stardew Valley has its own official cookbook, designed by the same team that brought you Fangamer's Stardew Valley Player's Guide – so you know it's on point!

Written as the official cookbook of The Queen of Sauce, the hostess of Stardew Valley's in-universe cooking show, the collection is divided into the four seasons and showcases some of the game's best-known recipes, from the Complete Breakfast to the Strange Bun. There's running commentary from the Queen throughout, as well as from the Valley's residents, offering personal insights and some world building to accompany their favorite recipes. Lovely food photography and whimsical hand-drawn art by Kari Fry grace each page, but there are a few recipes that I wish received the photographic treatment just from their descriptions alone!

The emphasis in this book is on cooking completely from scratch with farm-fresh ingredients – just like your farmer would. There are a few recipes that call for ready-made ingredients, but there are also instructions for making your own vegetable and seafood stocks, as well as breads, pie crusts, jams and sauces. Also, this cookbook is tailor-made for vegetarians and pescatarians, with lots of seafood and plant-based dishes, which is a huge plus in my household! There are a few helpful substitutions given, like turning the Fiddlehead Risotto into an Asparagus Risotto, but an index of suggested sources for some of the more "exotic" ingredients would have been useful as well. (What is a French breakfast radish?) There are also a few recipes that call for specialized equipment that might not be readily available for most home chefs, and some of the techniques might be a little daunting for beginners. But it's worth it to try!

I decided to try making the Blackberry Cobbler, which is a recipe in the Autumn chapter (despite blackberries being a summer fruit in my area), and while it was a little labor-intensive (I had to grate a stick of frozen butter into the flour mixture for the biscuit topping), it was worth the effort – it was the right combination of tart, sweet and buttery that smelled and tasted like it came out of the oven at The Stardrop Saloon.

My only regret: no vanilla ice cream around to top it with! **– REBECCA**



9.5

StardewValleyCookbook.com

Summer

Lucky Lunch

SHRIMP CEVICHE ON A BED OF GREENS

FROM THE KITCHEN OF: THE QUEEN OF SAUCE

YIELD: MAKES 4 SERVINGS

If you've been on the hunt for the perfect seafood lunch, then you're in luck! A tangy mix of poached shrimp and fresh vegetables nestled between two star-shaped toasted tortillas delivers a cool, refreshing blast of seafood flavor with every bite. The tortilla stars can be broken up into chips as you eat, or if you're feeling especially adventurous–and have plenty of napkins handy–you can try eating the whole thing like a sandwich. After you've cleaned your plate, you're bound to feel like the spirits are smiling down on you all day long!

INGREDIENTS

6 cups (1½ quarts) **WATER**

⅓ cup **FRESH LIME JUICE** (from about 4 juicy limes)

KOSHER SALT

12 ounces large or extra-large **SHRIMP**, peeled, deveined, and tails removed

5 tablespoons **EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE OIL**

¾ teaspoon **GRANULATED SUGAR**

2 **GARLIC CLOVES**, grated

½ small **RED ONION**, finely chopped

1 small **JALAPEÑO**, halved, seeded (if desired), and thinly sliced

1 large **PERSIAN CUCUMBER**, quartered lengthwise and cut into ½-inch pieces

1 cup **RAINBOW CHERRY TOMATOES**, quartered

12 (6½-inch) **YELLOW CORN TORTILLAS**

1 small **AVOCADO**, halved, pit removed, cut into ½-inch cubes

3 tablespoons thinly sliced **FRESH CHIVE GREENS**, plus flowers for garnish (see Queen's Tips)

¼ cup coarsely chopped **FRESH CILANTRO LEAVES** and **SOFT STEMS**

2 packed cups thinly sliced **ROMAINE LETTUCE**

Special Equipment

6-inch **STAR STENCIL** (see Queen's Tips)

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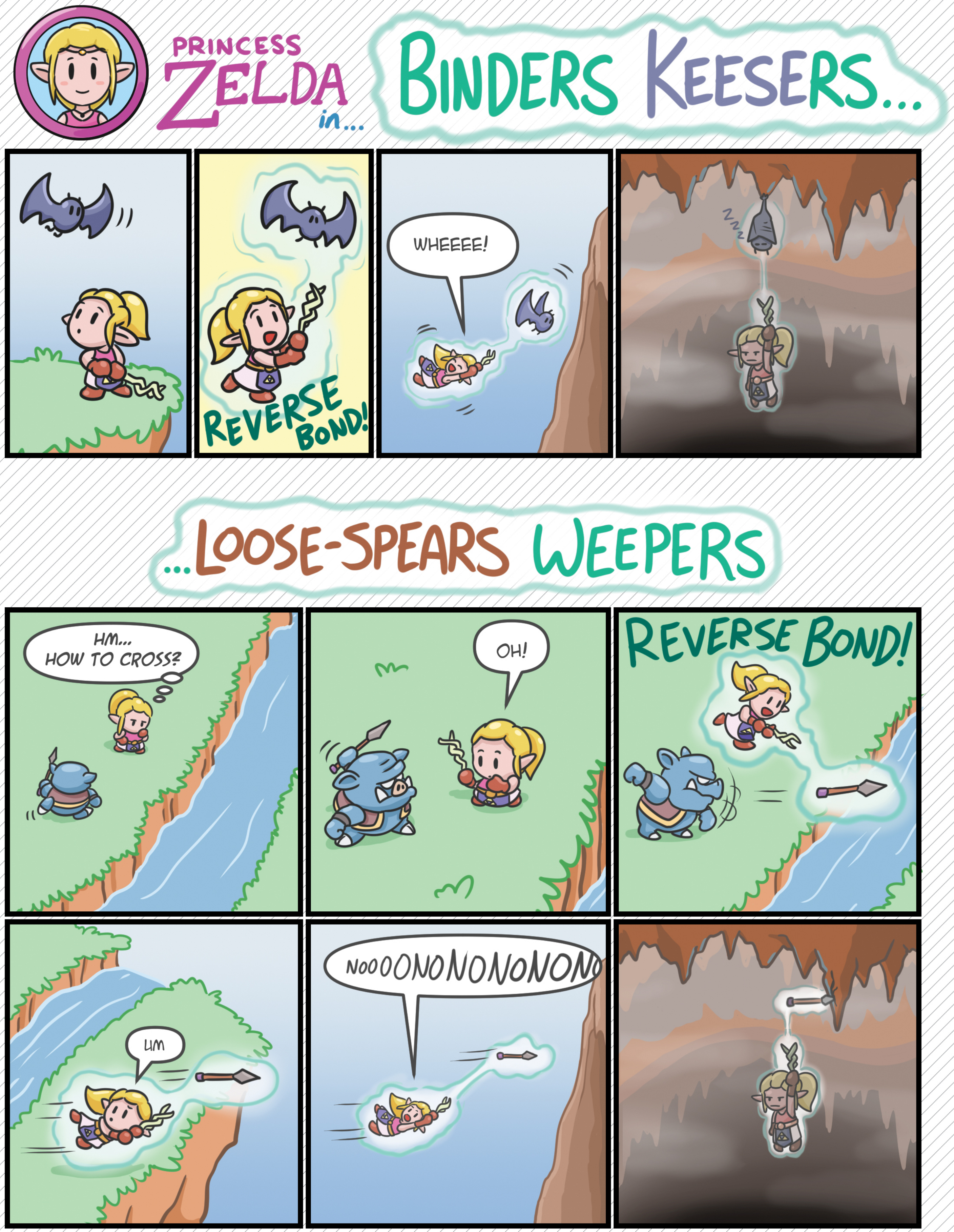

BY MATTHEW TARANTO

NEXT ISSUE

Gaming's sisters got to share the spotlight for this issue, so next time we're giving a boost to the boys!

Brothers in particular, as the Mario & Luigi series has been unexpectedly revived with a new installment that puts fraternity front and center: **Mario & Luigi: Brothership!** We'll do a deep dive into everything we're expecting to see in the sea we'll be setting sail upon, reviewing the history of that particular branch of the Mario RPG family tree and paying our respects to the original developers of the brand, AlphaDream.

Beyond the bro-down, we'll bring you our full reviews of new releases like **The Legend of Zelda: Echoes of Wisdom** and **Emio - The Smiling Man,** Nintendo's first in-house-developed M-rated title. (Eek!) Until next time!

IN THE WORKS FOR ISSUE #74:

MARIO & LUIGI: BROTHERSHIP

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: ECHOES OF WISDOM

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY RETURNS HD

RIVER CITY GIRLS 2: DOUBLE DRAGON DLC

EMIO - THE SMILING MAN: FAMICOM DETECTIVE CLUB

STEAMWORLD HEIST II

YARS RISING

CLOCK TOWER: REWIND

ACE ATTORNEY INVESTIGATIONS COLLECTION

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: SPLINTERED FATE

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: MUTANTS UNLEASHED

CASTAWAY

DISNEY EPIC MICKEY: REBRUSHED

THE PLUCKY SQUIRE

THE MAKING OF **THE IMPACT OF IWATA**

AND MUCH **MORE!**

NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER 2024

NINTENDO POWER'S ORIGINAL LEADER

A LITTLE OVER 36 years ago now, the first-ever issue of Nintendo Power magazine began to land in NES players' mailboxes. On Page 5 of that inaugural edition, up near the top-right corner and printed in a small font, appeared the name Gail Tilden. That's a name that more gamers should know!

Gail Tilden was the original Editor-in-Chief of Nintendo Power, the legendary publication that propelled Nintendo's original 8-bit Entertainment System to even more stratospheric levels of popularity beginning in the summer of 1988. She guided its creation and led the team of artists, writers and designers who assembled each eye-popping issue — a travel-intensive job that involved tons of back-and-forth flights to Japan to coordinate with design teams there. Her Herculean efforts were worth it, though: After sending Nintendo Power #1 out to 3,300,000 potential customers for free, Gail and her team were able to convert 1,300,000 of those gamers of the late '80s into paid subscribers. That laid the foundation for a trailblazing magazine that then endured for 24 years!

Howard Phillips, the bow-tie-wearing President of the Nintendo Fun Club and one half of Nintendo Power's comic strip comedy duo Howard & Nester, is most often remembered as the driving force behind the creation of the magazine. That's due to him being so visible throughout NP's earliest era, with his picture popping up all over the place and each issue ending with a letter from him and his own signature. But Howard was only ever credited as a Senior Editor and Game Consultant — a critical team member, for sure, but not the magazine's EIC. That was always Gail.

Throughout NP's first decade, that is. She remained in the Editor-in-Chief role for the magazine's first 10 years, but shifted gears and transitioned to a new job within Nintendo in 1998 — she became the leader of the Big N's efforts to introduce the Pokémon brand to North America! (Ultimately an even more critical role.) I was honored to be able to meet and talk with Gail at the Long Island Retro Gaming Expo, and thought there'd be no better way to end this issue than honoring her! **— LUCAS**

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